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THE  
EARTHLY PARADISE.  
MAY, JUNE, JULY, AUGUST.

## M A Y.

O LOVE, this morn when the sweet nightingale  
Had so long finished all he had to say,  
That thou hadst slept, and sleep had told his tale ;  
And midst a peaceful dream had stolen away  
In fragrant dawning of the first of May,  
Didst thou see aught ? didst thou hear voices sing  
Ere to the risen sun the bells 'gan ring ?

For then methought the Lord of Love went by  
To take possession of his flowery throne,  
Ringed round with maids, and youths, and minstrelsy ;  
A little while I sighed to find him gone,  
A little while the dawning was alone,  
And the light gathered ; then I held my breath,  
And shuddered at the sight of Eld and Death.

Alas ! Love passed me in the twilight dun,  
His music hushed the wakening ousel's song ;  
But on these twain shone out the golden sun,  
And o'er their heads the brown bird's tune was strong,  
As shivering, twixt the trees they stole along ;  
None noted aught their noiseless passing by,  
The world had quite forgotten it must die.

NOW must these men be glad a little while  
That they *had* lived to see May once more  
smile

Upon the earth ; wherefore, as men who know  
How fast the bad days and the good days go,  
They gathered at the feast : the fair abode  
Wherein they sat, o'erlooked, across the road  
Unhedged green meads, which willowy streams passed  
through,

And on that morn, before the fresh May dew  
Had dried upon the sunniest spot of grass,  
From bush to bush did youths and maidens pass  
In raiment meet for May apparelled,  
Gathering the milk-white blossoms and the red ;  
And now, with noon long past, and that bright day  
Growing aweary, on the sunny way  
They wandered, crowned with flowers, and loitering,  
And weary, yet were fresh enough to sing  
The carols of the morn, and pensive, still  
Had cast away their doubt of death and ill,  
And flushed with love, no more grew red with shame.

So to the elders as they sat, there came,  
With scent of flowers, the murmur of that folk  
Wherethrough from time to time a song outbroke,  
Till scarce they thought about the story due ;

Yet, when anigh to sun-setting it grew,  
A book upon the board an elder laid,  
And turning from the open window said,  
“Too fair a tale the lovely time doth ask,  
For this of mine to be an easy task,  
Yet in what words soever this is writ,  
As for the matter, I dare say of it  
That it is lovely as the lovely May ;  
Pass then the manner, since the learned say  
No written record was there of the tale,  
Ere we from our fair land of Greece set sail ;  
How this may be I know not, this I know  
That such-like tales the wind would seem to blow  
From place to place, e'en as the feathery seed  
Is borne across the sea to help the need  
Of barren isles ; so, sirs, from seed thus sown,  
This flower, a gift from other lands has grown.

THE  
STORY OF CUPID AND PSYCHE.

ARGUMENT.

PSYCHE, a king's daughter, by her exceeding beauty caused the people to forget Venus ; therefore the goddess would fain have destroyed her : nevertheless she became the bride of Love, yet in an unhappy moment lost him by her own fault, and wandering through the world suffered many evils at the hands of Venus, for whom she must accomplish fearful tasks. But the gods and all nature helped her, and in process of time she was reunited to Love, forgiven by Venus, and made immortal by the Father of gods and men.

I N the Greek land of old there was a King  
Happy in battle, rich in everything ;  
Most rich in this, that he a daughter had  
Whose beauty made the longing city glad.  
She was so fair, that strangers from the sea  
Just landed, in the temples thought that she  
Was Venus visible to mortal eyes,  
New come from Cyprus for a world's surprise.  
She was so beautiful that had she stood  
On windy Ida by the oaken wood,



And bared her limbs to that bold shepherd's gaze,  
Troy might have stood till now with happy days ;  
And those three fairest, all have left the land  
And left her with the apple in her hand.

And Psyche is her name in stories old,  
As ever by our fathers we were told.

All this beheld Queen Venus from her throne,  
And felt that she no longer was alone  
In beauty, but, if only for a while,  
This maiden matched her god-enticing smile ;  
Therefore, she wrought in such a wise, that she,  
If honoured as a goddess, certainly  
Was dreaded as a goddess none the less,  
And midst her wealth, dwelt long in loneliness.

Two sisters had she, and men deemed them fair,  
But as King's daughters might be anywhere,  
And these to men of name and great estate  
Were wedded, while at home must Psyche wait.  
The sons of kings before her silver feet  
Still bowed, and sighed for her ; in measures sweet  
The minstrels to the people sung her praise,  
Yet must she live a virgin all her days.

So to Apollo's fane her father sent,  
Seeking to know the dreadful Gods' intent,  
And therewith sent he goodly gifts of price  
A silken veil, wrought with a paradise,

Three golden bowls, set round with many a gem,  
 Three silver robes, with gold in every hem,  
 And a fair ivory image of the god  
 That underfoot a golden serpent trod ;  
 And when three lords with these were gone away,  
 Nor could return until the fortieth day,  
 Ill was the King at ease, and neither took  
 Joy in the chase, or in the pictured book  
 The skilled Athenian limner had just wrought,  
 Nor in the golden cloths from India brought.

At last the day came for those lords' return,  
 And then 'twixt hope and fear the King did burn,  
 As on his throne with great pomp he was set,  
 And by him Psyche, knowing not as yet  
 Why they had gone : thus waiting, at noontide  
 They in the palace heard a voice outside,  
 And soon the messengers came hurrying,  
 And with pale faces knelt before the King,  
 And rent their clothes, and each man on his head  
 Cast dust, the while a trembling courtier read  
 This scroll, wherein the fearful answer lay,  
 Whereat from every face joy passed away.

#### THE ORACLE.

O FATHER of a most unhappy maid,  
 O King, whom all the world henceforth shall  
     know  
 As wretched among wretches, be afraid

To ask the gods thy misery to show,  
But if thou needs must hear it, to thy woe  
Take back thy gifts to feast thine eyes upon,  
When thine own flesh and blood some beast hath won.

“For hear thy doom, a rugged rock there is  
Set back a league from thine own palace fair,  
There leave the maid, that she may wait the kiss  
Of the fell monster that doth harbour there :  
This is the mate for whom her yellow hair  
And tender limbs have been so fashioned,  
This is the pillow for her lovely head.

“O what an evil from thy loins shall spring,  
For all the world this monster overturns,  
He is the bane of every mortal thing,  
And this world ruined, still for more he yearns ;  
A fire there goeth from his mouth that burns  
Worse than the flame of Phlegethon the red—  
To such a monster shall thy maid be wed.

“And if thou sparest now to do this thing,  
I will destroy thee and thy land also,  
And of dead corpses shalt thou be the King,  
And stumbling through the dark land shalt thou go,  
Howling for second death to end thy woe ;  
Live therefore as thou mayst and do my will,  
And be a King that men may envy still.”

What man was there, whose face changed not for grief  
 At hearing this? Psyche, shrunk like the leaf  
 The autumn frost first touches on the tree,  
 Stared round about with eyes that could not see,  
 And muttered sounds from lips that said no word,  
 And still within her ears the sentence heard  
 When all was said and silence fell on all  
 'Twixt marble columns and adorned wall.

Then spoke the King, bowed down with misery :  
 " What help is left ! O daughter, let us die,  
 Or else together fleeing from this land,  
 From town to town go wandering hand in hand  
 Thou and I, daughter, till all men forget  
 That ever on a throne I have been set,  
 And then, when houseless and disconsolate,  
 We ask an alms before some city gate,  
 The gods perchance a little gift may give,  
 And suffer thee and me like beasts to live."

Then answered Psyche, through her bitter tears,  
 " Alas ! my father, I have known these years  
 That with some woe the gods have dowered me,  
 And weighed 'gainst riches infelicity ;  
 Ill is it then against the gods to strive ;  
 Live on, O father, those that are alive  
 May still be happy ; would it profit me  
 To live awhile, and ere I died to see  
 Thee perish, and all folk who love me well,  
 And then at last be dragged myself to hell  
 Cursed of all men ? nay, since all things must die,

And I have dreamed not of eternity,  
Why weepest thou that I must die to-day?  
Why weepest thou? cast thought of shame away.  
The dead are not ashamed, they feel no pain;  
I have heard folk who spoke of death as gain—  
And yet—ah, God, if I had been some maid,  
Toiling all day, and in the night-time laid  
Asleep on rushes—had I only died  
Before this sweet life I had fully tried,  
Upon that day when for my birth men sung,  
And o'er the feasting folk the sweet bells rung."

And therewith she arose and gat away,  
And in her chamber, mourning long she lay,  
Thinking of all the days that might have been,  
And how that she was born to be a queen,  
The prize of some great conqueror of renown,  
The joy of many a country and fair town,  
The high desire of every prince and lord,  
One who could fright with careless smile or word  
The hearts of heroes fearless in the war,  
The glory of the world, the leading-star  
Unto all honour and all earthly fame—  
—Round goes the wheel, and death and deadly shame  
Shall be her lot, while yet of her men sing  
Unwitting that the gods have done this thing.  
Long time she lay there, while the sunbeams moved  
Over her body through the flowers she loved;  
And in the eaves the sparrows chirped outside,

Until for weariness she grew dry-eyed,  
And into an unhappy sleep she fell.

But of the luckless King now must we tell,  
Who sat devising means to 'scape that shame,  
Until the frightened people thronging came  
About the palace, and drove back the guards,  
Making their way past all the gates and wards ;  
And, putting chamberlains and marshals by,  
Surged round the very throne tumultuously.  
Then knew the wretched King all folk had heard  
The miserable sentence, and the word  
The gods had spoken ; and from out his seat  
He rose, and spoke in humble words, unmeet  
For a great King, and prayed them give him grace,  
While 'twixt his words the tears ran down his face  
On to his raiment stiff with golden thread.

But little heeded they the words he said,  
For very fear had made them pitiless ;  
Nor cared they for the maid and her distress,  
But clashed their spears together and 'gan cry :  
" For one man's daughter shall the people die,  
And this fair land become an empty name,  
Because thou art afraid to meet the shame  
Wherewith the gods reward thy hidden sin ?  
Nay, by their glory do us right herein !"

" Ye are in haste to have a poor maid slain,"  
The King said ; " but my will herein is vain,  
For ye are many, I one aged man :

Let one man speak, if for his shame he can."

Then stepped a sturdy dyer forth, who said,—  
"Fear of the gods brings no shame, by my head.  
Listen ; thy daughter we would have thee leave  
Upon the fated mountain this same eve ;  
And thither must she go right well arrayed  
In marriage raiment, loose hair as a maid,  
And saffron veil, and with her shall there go  
Fair maidens bearing torches, two and two ;  
And minstrels, in such raiment as is meet  
The god-ordained fearful spouse to greet.  
So shalt thou save our wives and little ones,  
And something better than a heap of stones,  
Dwelt in by noisesome things, this town shall be,  
And thou thyself shalt keep thy sovereignty ;  
But if thou wilt not do the thing I say,  
Then shalt thou live in bonds from this same day,  
And we will bear thy maid unto the hill,  
And from the dread gods save the city still."

Then loud they shouted at the words he said,  
And round the head of the unhappy maid,  
Dreaming uneasily of long-past joys,  
Floated the echo of that dreadful noise,  
And changed her dreams to dreams of misery.  
But when the King knew that the thing must be,  
And that no help there was in this distress,  
He bade them have all things in readiness  
To take the maiden out at sun-setting,  
And wed her to the unknown dreadful thing.

So through the palace passed with heavy cheer  
Her women gathering the sad wedding gear ;  
Who lingering long, yet at the last must go,  
To waken Psyche to her bitter woe.  
So coming to her bower, they found her there,  
From head to foot rolled in her yellow hair,  
As in the saffron veil she should be soon  
Betwixt the setting sun and rising moon ;  
But when above her a pale maiden bent  
And touched her, from her heart a sigh she sent,  
And waking, on their woeful faces stared,  
Sitting upright, with one white shoulder bared  
By writhing on the bed in wretchedness.  
Then suddenly remembering her distress,  
She bowed her head and 'gan to weep and wail  
But let them wrap her in the bridal veil,  
And bind the sandals to her silver feet,  
And set the rose-wreath on her tresses sweet ;  
But, spoke no word, yea, rather, wearily  
Turned from the yearning face and pitying eye  
Of any maid who seemed about to speak.

Now through the garden trees the sun 'gan break,  
And that inevitable time drew near ;  
Then through the courts, grown cruel, strange, and drear,  
Since the bright morn, they led her to the gate,  
Where she beheld a golden litter wait.  
Whereby the King stood, aged and bent to earth,  
The flute-players with faces void of mirth,  
The down-cast bearers of the ivory wands,



The maiden torch-bearers' unhappy bands.

So then was Psyche taken to the hill,  
And through the town the streets were void and still ;  
For in their houses all the people stayed,  
Of that most mournful music sore afraid.  
But on the way a marvel did they see,  
For, passing by, where wrought of ivory,  
There stood the Goddess of the flowery isle,  
All folk could see the carven image smile.

But when anigh the hill's bare top they came,  
Where Psyche must be left to meet her shame,  
They set the litter down, and drew aside  
The golden curtains from the wretched bride,  
Who at their bidding rose and with them went  
Afoot amidst her maids with head down-bent,  
Until they came unto the drear rock's brow ;  
And there she stood apart, not weeping now,  
But pale as privet blossom is in June.  
There as the quivering flutes left off their tune,  
In trembling arms the weeping, haggard King  
Caught Psyche, who, like some half-lifeless thing,  
Took all his kisses, and no word could say,  
Until at last perforce he turned away ;  
Because the longest agony has end,  
And homeward through the twilight did they wend.

But Psyche, now faint and bewildered,  
Remembered little of her pain and dread ;

Her doom drawn nigh took all her fear away,  
And left her faint and weary ; as they say  
It haps to one who 'neath a lion lies,  
Who stunned and helpless feels not ere he dies  
The horror of the yellow fell, the red  
Hot mouth, and white teeth gleaming o'er his head :  
So Psyche felt, as sinking on the ground  
She cast one weary vacant look around,  
And at the ending of that wretched day  
Swooning beneath the risen moon she lay.

NOW backward must our story go awhile  
And unto Cyprus the fair flowered isle,  
Where hid away from every worshipper  
Was Venus sitting, and her son by her  
Standing to mark what words she had to say,  
While in his dreadful wings the wind did play :  
Frowning she spoke, in plucking from her thigh  
The fragrant flowers that clasped it lovingly.

“ In such a town, O son, a maid there is  
Whom any amorous man this day would kiss  
As gladly as a goddess like to me,  
And though I know an end to this must be,  
When white and red and gold are waxen grey  
Down on the earth, while unto me one day  
Is as another ; yet behold, my son,

And go through all my temples one by one  
And look what incense rises unto me ;  
Hearken the talk of sailors from the sea  
Just landed, ever will it be the same,  
'Hast thou then seen her?'—Yea, unto my shame  
Within the temple that is called mine,  
As through the veil I watched the altar shine  
This happened ; a man with outstretched hand there  
stood,

Glittering in arms, of smiling joyous mood,  
With crisp, black hair, and such a face one sees  
But seldom now, and limbs like Hercules ;  
But as he stood there in my holy place,  
Across mine image came the maiden's face,  
And when he saw her, straight the warrior said  
Turning about unto an earthly maid,  
'O, lady Venus, thou art kind to me  
After so much of wandering on the sea  
To show thy very body to me here,'  
But when this impious saying I did hear,  
I sent them a great portent, for straightway  
I quenched the fire, and no priest on that day  
Could light it any more for all his prayer.

"So must she fall, so must her golden hair  
Flash no more through the city, or her feet  
Be seen like lilies moving down the street ;  
No more must men watch her soft raiment cling  
About her limbs, no more must minstrels sing  
The praises of her arms and hidden breast.

And thou it is, my son, must give me rest  
From all this worship wearisomely paid  
Unto a mortal who should be afraid  
To match the gods in beauty ; take thy bow  
And dreadful arrows, and about her sow  
The seeds of folly, and with such an one  
I pray thee cause her mingle, fair my son,  
That not the poorest peasant girl in Greece  
Would look on for the gift of Jason's fleece.  
Do this, and see thy mother glad again,  
And free from insult, in her temples reign  
Over the hearts of lovers in the spring."

"Mother," he said, "thou askest no great thing,  
Some wretch too bad for death I soon shall find,  
Who round her perfect neck his arms shall wind.  
She shall be driven from the palace gate  
Where once her crowd of worshippers would wait  
From earliest morning till the dew was dry  
On chance of seeing her gold gown glancing by ;  
'There through the storm of curses shall she go  
In evil raiment midst the winter snow,  
Or in the summer in rough sheepskins clad.  
And thus, O mother, shall I make thee glad  
Remembering all the honour thou hast brought  
Unto mine altars ; since as thine own thought  
My thought is grown, my mind as thy dear mind."

Then straight he rose from earth and down the wind

Went glittering 'twixt the blue sky and the sea,  
And so unto the place came presently  
Where Psyche dwelt, and through the gardens fair  
Passed seeking her, and as he wandered there  
Had still no thought but to do all her will,  
Nor cared to think if it were good or ill :  
So beautiful and pitiless he went,  
And toward him still the blossomed fruit-trees leant,  
And after him the wind crept murmuring,  
And on the boughs the birds forgot to sing.

Withal at last amidst a fair green close,  
Hedged round about with woodbine and red rose,  
Within the flicker of a white-thorn shade  
In gentle sleep he found the maiden laid ,  
One hand that held a book had fallen away  
Across her body, and the other lay  
Upon a marble fountain's plashing rim,  
Among whose broken waves the fish showed dim,  
But yet its wide-flung spray now woke her not,  
Because the summer day at noon was hot,  
And all sweet sounds and scents were lulling her.

So soon the rustle of his wings 'gan stir  
Her looser folds of raiment, and the hair  
Spread wide upon the grass and daisies fair,  
As Love cast down his eyes with a half smile  
Godlike and cruel ; that faded in a while,  
And long he stood above her hidden eyes  
With red lips parted in a god's surprise.

Then very Love knelt down beside the maid  
And on her breast a hand unfelt he laid,  
And drew the gown from off her dainty feet,  
And set his fair cheek to her shoulder sweet,  
And kissed her lips that knew of no love yet,  
And wondered if his heart would e'er forget  
The perfect arm that o'er her body lay.

But now by chance a damsel came that way,  
One of her ladies, and saw not the god,  
Yet on his shafts cast down had well-nigh trod  
In wakening Psyche, who rose up in haste  
And girded up her gown about her waist,  
And with that maid went drowsily away.

From place to place Love followed her that day  
And ever fairer to his eyes she grew,  
So that at last when from her bower he flew,  
And underneath his feet the moonlit sea  
Went shepherding his waves disorderly,  
He swore that of all gods and men, no one  
Should hold her in his arms but he alone ;  
That she should dwell with him in glorious wise  
Like to a goddess in some paradise ;  
Yea, he would get from Father Jove this grace  
That she should never die, but her sweet face  
And wonderful fair body should endure  
Till the foundations of the mountains sure  
Were molten in the sea ; so utterly

Did he forget his mother's cruelty.

And now that he might come to this fair end,  
He found Apollo, and besought him lend  
His throne of divination for a while,  
Whereby he did the priestess there beguile,  
To give the cruel answer ye have heard  
Unto those lords, who wrote it word by word,  
And back unto the King its threatenings bore,  
Whereof there came that grief and mourning sore,  
Of which ye wot ; thereby is Psyche laid  
Upon the mountain-top ; thereby, afraid  
Of some ill yet, within the city fair  
Cower down the people that have sent her there.

Withal did Love call unto him the Wind  
Called Zephyrus, who most was to his mind,  
And said, " O rainy wooer of the spring,  
I pray thee, do for me an easy thing ;  
To such a hill-top go, O gentle Wind,  
And there a sleeping maiden shalt thou find ;  
Her perfect body in thine arms with care  
Take up, and unto the green valley bear  
That lies before my noble house of gold ;  
There leave her lying on the daisies cold."

Then, smiling, toward the place the fair Wind went.  
While 'neath his wing the sleeping lilies bent,  
And flying 'twixt the green earth and the sea  
Made the huge anchored ships dance merrily,

And swung round from the east the gilded vanes  
On many a palace, and from unhorsed wains  
Twitched off the wheat-straw in his hurried flight ;  
But ere much time had passed he came in sight  
Of Psyche laid in swoon upon the hill,  
And smiling, set himself to do Love's will ;  
For in his arms he took her up with care,  
Wondering to see a mortal made so fair,  
And came into the vale in little space,  
And set her down in the most flowery place ;  
And then unto the plains of Thessaly  
Went ruffling up the edges of the sea.

Now underneath the world the moon was gone,  
But brighter shone the stars so left alone,  
Until a faint green light began to show  
Far in the east, whereby did all men know,  
Who lay awake either with joy or pain,  
That day was coming on their heads again ;  
Then widening, soon it spread to grey twilight,  
And in a while with gold the east was bright ;  
The birds burst out a-singing one by one,  
And o'er the hill-top rose the mighty sun.

Therewith did Psyche open wide her eyes,  
And rising on her arm, with great surprise  
Gazed on the flowers wherein so deep she lay,  
And wondered why upon that dawn of day  
Out in the fields she had lift up her head  
Rather than in her balmy gold-hung bed.



Then, suddenly remembering all her woes,  
She sprang upon her feet, and yet arose  
Within her heart a mingled hope and dread  
Of some new thing : and now she raised her head,  
And gazing round about her timidly,  
A lovely grassy valley could she see,  
That steep grey cliffs upon three sides did bound,  
And under these, a river sweeping round,  
With gleaming curves the valley did embrace,  
And seemed to make an island of that place ;  
And all about were dotted leafy trees,  
The elm for shade, the linden for the bees,  
The noble oak, long ready for the steel  
Which in that place it had no fear to feel ;  
The pomegranate, the apple, and the pear,  
That fruit and flowers at once made shift to bear,  
Nor yet decayed therefor, and in them hung  
Bright birds that elsewhere sing not, but here sung  
As sweetly as the small brown nightingales  
Within the wooded, deep Laconian vales.

But right across the vale, from side to side,  
A high white wall all further view did hide,  
But that above it, vane and pinnacle  
Rose up, of some great house beyond to tell,  
And still betwixt these, mountains far away  
Against the sky rose shadowy, cold, and grey.

She, standing in the yellow morning sun,  
Could scarcely think her happy life was done,

Or that the place was made for misery ;  
Yea, some lone heaven it rather seemed to be,  
Which for the coming band of gods did wait ;  
Hope touched her heart ; no longer desolate,  
Deserted of all creatures did she feel,  
And o'er her face sweet colour 'gan to steal,  
That deepened to a flush, as wandering thought  
Desires before unknown unto her brought,  
So mighty was the God, though far away.

But trembling midst her hope, she took her way  
Unto a little door midmost the wall,  
And still on odorous flowers her feet did fall,  
And round about her did the strange birds sing,  
Praising her beauty in their carolling.  
'Thus coming to the door, when now her hand  
First touched the lock, in doubt she needs must stand,  
And to herself she said, "Lo, here the trap !  
And yet, alas ! whatever now may hap,  
How can I 'scape the ill which waiteth me ?  
Let me die now !" and herewith, tremblingly,  
She raised the latch, and her sweet sinless eyes  
Beheld a garden like a paradise,  
Void of mankind, fairer than words can say,  
Wherein did joyous harmless creatures play  
After their kind, and all amidst the trees  
Were strange-wrought founts and wondrous images ;  
And glimmering 'twixt the boughs could she behold  
A house made beautiful with beaten gold,  
Whose open doors in the bright sun did gleam ;

Lonely, but not deserted did it seem.

Long time she stood debating what to do,  
But at the last she passed the wicket through,  
Which, shutting clamorously behind her, sent  
A pang of fear throughout her as she went ;  
But when through all that green place she had passed.  
And by the palace porch she stood at last,  
And saw how wonderfully the wall was wrought,  
With curious stones from far-off countries brought,  
And many an image and fair history  
Of what the world has been, and yet shall be,  
And all set round with golden craftsmanship,  
Well-wrought as some renowned cup's royal lip,  
She had a thought again to turn aside :  
And yet again, not knowing where to bide,  
She entered softly, and with trembling hands  
Holding her gown ; the wonder of all lands  
Met there the wonders of the land and sea.

Now went she through the chambers tremblingly,  
And oft in going would she pause and stand,  
And drop the gathered raiment from her hand,  
Still the beating of her heart for fear  
As voices whispering low she seemed to hear,  
But then again the wind it seemed to be  
Moving the golden hangings doubtfully,  
Or some bewildered swallow passing close  
Unto the pane, or some wind-beaten rose.  
Soon seeing that no evil thing came near,

A little she began to lose her fear,  
And gaze upon the wonders of the place,  
And in the silver mirrors saw her face  
Grown strange to her amidst that loneliness,  
And stooped to feel the web her feet did press,  
Wrought by the brown slim-fingered Indian's toil  
Amidst the years of war and vain turmoil ;  
Or she the figures of the hangings felt,  
Or daintily the unknown blossoms smelt,  
Or stood and pondered what new thing might mean  
The images of knight and king and queen  
Wherewith the walls were pictured here and there,  
Or touched rich vessels with her fingers fair,  
And o'er her delicate smooth cheek would pass  
The long-fixed bubbles of strange works of glass :  
So wandered she amidst these marvels new  
Until anigh the noontide now it grew.

At last she came unto a chamber cool  
Paved cunningly in manner of a pool,  
Where red fish seemed to swim through floating weed  
And at the first she thought it so indeed,  
And took the sandals quickly from her feet,  
But when the glassy floor these did but meet  
The shadow of a long-forgotten smile  
Her anxious face a moment did beguile ;  
And crossing o'er, she found a table spread  
With dainty food, as delicate white bread  
And fruits piled up and covered savoury meat,  
As though a king were coming there to eat,

For the worst vessel was of beaten gold.

Now when these dainties Psyche did behold  
She fain had eaten, but did nowise dare,  
Thinking she saw a god's feast lying there.  
But as she turned to go the way she came  
She heard a low soft voice call out her name,  
Then she stood still, and trembling gazed around,  
And seeing no man, nigh sank upon the ground,  
Then through the empty air she heard the voice.

“O, lovely one, fear not ! rather rejoice  
That thou art come unto thy sovereignty :  
Sit now and eat, this feast is but for thee,  
Yea, do whatso thou wilt with all things here,  
And in thine own house cast away thy fear,  
For all is thine, and little things are these  
So loved a heart as thine, awhile to please.

“Be patient ! thou art loved by such an one  
As will not leave thee mourning here alone,  
But rather cometh on this very night ;  
And though he needs must hide him from thy sight  
Yet all his words of love thou well mayst hear,  
And pour thy woes into no careless ear.

“Bethink thee then, with what solemnity  
Thy folk, thy father, did deliver thee  
To him who loves thee thus, and void of dread  
Remember, sweet, thou art a bride new-wed.”

Now hearing this, did Psyche, trembling sore

And yet with lighter heart than heretofore,  
Sit down and eat, till she grew scarce afraid ;  
And nothing but the summer noise she heard  
Within the garden, then, her meal being done,  
Within the window-seat she watched the sun  
Changing the garden-shadows, till she grew  
Fearless and happy, since she deemed she knew  
The worst that could befall, while still the best  
Shone a fair star far off: and mid the rest  
This brought her after all her grief and fear,  
She said, "How sweet it would be, could I hear,  
Soft music mate the drowsy afternoon,  
And drown awhile the bees' sad murmuring tune  
Within these flowering limes." E'en as she spoke,  
A sweet-voiced choir of unknown unseen folk  
Singing to words that match the sense of these  
Hushed the faint music of the linden trees.

SONG.

O PENSIVE, tender maid, downcast and shy,  
Who turnest pale e'en at the name of love,  
And with flushed face must pass the elm-tree by  
Ashamed to hear the passionate grey dove  
Moan to his mate, thee too the god shall move,  
Thee too the maidens shall ungird one day,  
And with thy girdle put thy shame away.

What then, and shall white winter ne'er be done  
Because the glittering frosty morn is fair?

Because against the early-setting sun  
Bright show the gilded boughs though waste and bare ?  
Because the robin singeth free from care ?  
Ah ! these are memories of a better day  
When on earth's face the lips of summer lay.

Come then, beloved one, for such as thee  
Love loveth, and their hearts he knoweth well,  
Who hoard their moments of felicity,  
As misers hoard the medals that they tell,  
Lest on the earth but paupers they should dwell :  
“ We hide our love to bless another day ;  
The world is hard, youth passes quick,” they say.

Ah, little ones, but if ye could forget  
Amidst your outpoured love that you must die,  
Then ye, my servants, were death's conquerors yet,  
And love to you should be eternity  
How quick soever might the days go by :  
Yes, ye are made immortal on the day  
Ye cease the dusty grains of time to weigh.

Thou hearkenest, love ? O, make no semblance then  
That thou art loved, but as thy custom is  
Turn thy grey eyes away from eyes of men,  
With hands down-dropped, that tremble with thy bliss,  
With hidden eyes, take thy first lover's kiss ;  
Call this eternity which is to-day,  
Nor dream that this our love can pass away

They ceased, and Psyche pondering o'er their song,  
Not fearing now that aught would do her wrong,  
About the chambers wandered at her will,  
And on the many marvels gazed her fill,  
Where'er she passed still noting everything,  
Then in the gardens heard the new birds sing  
And watched the red fish in the fountains play,  
And at the very faintest time of day  
Upon the grass lay sleeping for a while  
Midst heaven-sent dreams of bliss that made her smile ;  
And when she woke the shades were lengthening,  
So to the place where she had heard them sing  
She came again, and through a little door  
Entered a chamber with a marble floor,  
Open a-top unto the outer air,  
Beneath which lay a bath of water fair,  
Paved with strange stones and figures of bright gold,  
And from the steps thereof could she behold  
The slim-leaved trees against the evening sky  
Golden and calm, still moving languidly.

So for a time upon the brink she sat,  
Debating in her mind of this and that,  
And then arose and slowly from her cast  
Her raiment, and adown the steps she passed  
Into the water, and therein she played,  
Till of herself at last she grew afraid,  
And of the broken image of her face,  
And the loud splashing in that lonely place.  
So from the bath she gat her quietly,



And clad herself in whatso haste might be ;  
And when at last she was apparelled  
Unto a chamber came, where was a bed  
Of gold and ivory, and precious wood  
Some island bears where never man has stood ;  
And round about hung curtains of delight,  
Wherein were interwoven Day and Night  
Joined by the hands of Love, and round their wings  
Knots of fair flowers no earthly May-time brings.  
Strange for its beauty was the coverlet,  
With birds and beasts and flowers wrought over it ;  
And every cloth was made in daintier wise  
Than any man on earth could well devise :  
Yea, there such beauty was in everything,  
That she, the daughter of a mighty king,  
Felt strange therein, and trembled lest that she,  
Deceived by dreams, had wandered heedlessly  
Into a bower for some fair goddess made.  
Yet if perchance some man had thither strayed,  
It had been long ere he had noted aught  
But her sweet face, made pensive by the thought  
Of all the wonders that she moved in there.

But looking round, upon a table fair  
She saw a book wherein old tales were writ,  
And by the window sat, to read in it  
Until the dusk had melted into night,  
When waxen tapers did her servants light  
With unseen hands, until it grew like day.

And so at last upon the bed she lay,

And slept a dreamless sleep for weariness,  
Forgetting all the wonder and distress.

But at the dead of night she woke, and heard  
A rustling noise, and grew right sore afeard,  
Yea, could not move a finger for affright ;  
And all was darker now than darkest night.

• Withal a voice close by her did she hear.  
“ Alas, my love ! why tremblest thou with fear,  
While I am trembling with new happiness ?  
Forgive me, sweet, thy terror and distress :  
Not otherwise could this our meeting be.  
O loveliest ! such bliss awaiteth thee,  
For all thy trouble and thy shameful tears.  
Such nameless honour, and such happy years,  
As fall not unto women of the earth.  
Loved as thou art, thy short-lived pains are worth  
The glory and the joy unspeakable  
Wherein the Treasure of the World shall dwell :  
A little hope, a little patience yet,  
Ere everything thou wilt, thou may'st forget,  
Or else remember as a well-told tale,  
That for some pensive pleasure may avail.  
Canst thou not love me, then, who wrought thy woe,  
That thou the height and depth of joy mightst know ? ”

He spoke, and as upon the bed she lay,  
Trembling amidst new thoughts, he sent a ray

Of finest love unto her inmost heart,  
Till, murmuring low, she strove the night to part,  
And like a bride who meets her love at last,  
When the long days of yearning are o'erpast,  
She reached to him her perfect arms unseen,  
And said, "O Love, how wretched I have been!  
What hast thou done?" And by her side he lay,  
Till just before the dawning of the day.

THE sun was high when Psyche woke again,  
And turning to the place where he had lain  
And seeing no one, doubted of the thing  
That she had dreamed it, till a fair gold ring,  
Unseen before, upon her hand she found,  
And touching her bright head she felt it crowned  
With a bright circlet; then withal she sighed.  
And wondered how the oracle had lied,  
And wished her father knew it, and straightway  
Rose up and clad herself. Slow went the day,  
Though helped with many a solace, till came night:  
And therewithal the new, unseen delight,  
She learned to call her Love.

So passed away  
The days and nights, until upon a day  
As in the shade, at noon she lay asleep.  
She dreamed that she beheld her sisters weep,

And her old father clad in sorry guise,  
Grown foolish with the weight of miseries,  
Her friends black-clad and moving mournfully,  
And folk in wonder landed from the sea,  
At such a fall of such a matchless maid,  
And in some press apart her raiment laid  
Like precious relics, and an empty tomb  
Set in the palace telling of her doom.

Therefore she wept in sleep, and woke with tears  
Still on her face, and wet hair round her ears,  
And went about unhappily that day,  
Framing a gentle speech wherewith to pray  
For leave to see her sisters once again,  
That they might know her happy, and her pain  
Turned all to joy, and honour come from shame.

And so at last night and her lover came,  
And midst their fondling, suddenly she said,  
“O Love, a little time we have been wed,  
And yet I ask a boon of thee this night.”

“Psyche,” he said, “if my heart tells me right,  
This thy desire may bring us bitter woe,  
For who the shifting chance of fate can know?  
Yet, forasmuch as mortal hearts are weak,  
To-morrow shall my folk thy sisters seek,  
And bear them hither; but before the day  
Is fully ended must they go away.  
And thou—beware—for, fresh and good and true,  
Thou knowest not what worldly hearts may do,  
Or what a curse gold is unto the earth.

Beware lest from thy full heart, in thy mirth,  
Thou tell'st the story of thy love unseen :  
Thy loving, simple heart, fits not a queen."

Then by her kisses did she know he frowned,  
But close about him her fair arms she wound,  
Until for happiness he 'gan to smile,  
And in those arms forgot all else awhile.

So the next day, for joy that they should come, •  
Would Psyche further deck her strange new home,  
And even as she 'gan to think the thought,  
Quickly her will by unseen hands was wrought,  
Who came and went like thoughts. Yea, how should I  
Tell of the works of gold and ivory,  
The gems and images, those hands brought there  
The prisoned things of earth, and sea, and air,  
They brought to please their mistress? Many a beast,  
Such as King Bacchus in his reckless feast  
Makes merry with—huge elephants, snow-white  
With gilded tusks, or dusky-grey with bright  
And shining chains about their wrinkled necks ;  
The mailed rhinoceros, that of nothing recks ;  
Dusky-maned lions ; spotted leopards fair  
That through the cane-brake move, unseen as air ;  
The deep-mouthed tiger, dread of the brown man ;  
The eagle, and the peacock, and the swan —  
— These be the nobles of the birds and beasts.  
But therewithal, for laughter at their feasts,  
They brought them the gods' jesters, such as he

Quick-chattering apes, that yet in mockery  
Of anxious men wrinkle their ugly brows ;  
Strange birds with pouches, birds with beaks like prows  
Of merchant-ships, with tufted crests like threads,  
With unimaginable monstrous heads.

Lo, such as these, in many a gilded cage  
They brought, or chained for fear of sudden rage.

Then strewed they scented branches on the floor,  
And hung rose-garlands up by the great door,  
And wafted incense through the bowers and halls,  
And hung up fairer hangings on the walls,  
And filled the baths with water fresh and clear,  
And in the chambers laid apparel fair,  
And spread a table for a royal feast.

Then when from all these labours they had ceased,  
Psyche they sung to sleep with lullabies ;  
Who slept not long, but opening soon her eyes,  
Beheld her sisters on the threshold stand :  
Then did she run to take them by the hand,  
And laid her cheek to theirs, and murmured words  
Of little meaning, like the moan of birds,  
While they bewildered stood and gazed around,  
Like people who in some strange land have found  
One that they thought not of ; but she at last  
Stood back, and from her face the strayed locks cast,  
And, smiling through her tears, said, " Ah, that ye  
Should have to weep such useless tears for me !  
Alas, the burden that the city bears  
For nought ! O me, my father's burning tears,

That into all this honour I am come !  
Nay, does he live yet ? Is the ancient home  
Still standing ? do the galleys throng the quays ?  
Do the brown Indians glitter down the ways  
With rubies as of old ? Yes, yes, ye smile,  
For ye are thinking, but a little while  
Apart from these has she been dwelling here ;  
Truly, yet long enough, loved ones and dear,  
To make me other than I was of old,  
Though now when your dear faces I behold  
Am I myself again. But by what road  
Have ye been brought to this my new abode ?”

“ Sister,” said one, “ I rose up from my bed  
It seems this morn, and being apparelléd,  
And walking in my garden, in a swoon  
Helpless and unattended I sank down,  
Wherefrom I scarce am waked, for as a dream  
Dost thou with all this royal glory seem,  
But for thy kisses and thy words, O love.”

“ Yea, Psyche,” said the other, “ as I drove  
The ivory shuttle through the shuttle-race,  
All was changed suddenly, and in this place  
I found myself, and standing on my feet,  
Where me with sleepy words this one did greet.  
Now, sister, tell us whence these wonders come  
With all the godlike splendour of your home.”

“ Sisters,” she said, “ more marvels shall ye see  
When ye have been a little while with me,

Whereof I cannot tell you more than this  
That 'midst them all I dwell in ease and bliss,  
Well loved and wedded to a mighty lord,  
Fair beyond measure, from whose loving word  
I know that happier days await me yet.  
But come, my sisters, let us now forget  
To seek for empty knowledge ; ye shall take  
Some little gifts for your lost sister's sake ;  
And whatso wonders ye may see or hear  
Of nothing frightful have ye any fear."

Wondering they went with her, and looking round,  
Each in the other's eyes a strange look found,  
For these, her mother's daughters, had no part  
In her divine fresh singleness of heart,  
But longing to be great, remembered not  
How short a time one heart on earth has got.

But keener still that guarded look now grew  
As more of that strange lovely place they knew,  
And as with growing hate, but still afeard,  
The unseen choirs' heart-softening strains they heard,  
Which did but harden these ; and when at noon  
They sought the shaded waters' freshening boon,  
And all unhidden once again they saw  
That peerless beauty, free from any flaw,  
Which now at last had won its precious meed,  
Her kindness then but fed the fire of greed  
Within their hearts—her gifts, the rich attire  
Wherewith she clad them, where like sparks of fire  
The many-coloured gems shone midst the pearls



'The soft silks' winding lines, the work of girls  
By the Five Rivers ; their fair marvellous crowns,  
Their sandals' fastenings worth the rent of towns,  
Zones and carved rings, and nameless wonders fair,  
All things her faithful slaves had brought them there,  
Given amid kisses, made them not more glad ;  
Since in their hearts the ravening worm they had  
That love slays not, nor yet is satisfied  
While aught but he has aught ; yet still they tried  
To look as they deemed loving folk should look,  
And still with words of love her bounty took.

So at the last all being apparelléd,  
Her sisters to the banquet Psyche led,  
Fair were they, and each seemed a glorious queen  
With all that wondrous daintiness beseen,  
But Psyche clad in gown of dusky blue  
Little adorned, with deep grey eyes that knew  
The hidden marvels of Love's holy fire,  
Seemed like the soul of innocent desire,  
Shut from the mocking world, wherefrom those twain  
Seemed come to lure her thence with labour vain.

Now having reached the place where they should eat,  
Ere 'neath the canopy the three took seat,  
The eldest sister unto Psyche said,  
" And he, dear love, the man that thou hast wed,  
Will he not wish to-day thy kin to see ?  
Then could we tell of thy felicity

The better, to our folk and father dear."

Then Psyche reddened, "Nay, he is not here,"  
She stammered, "neither will be here to-day,  
For mighty matters keep him far away."  
"Alas!" the younger sister said, "Say then,  
What is the likeness of this first of men;  
What sayest thou about his loving eyne,  
Are his locks black, or golden-red as thine?"  
"Black-haired like me," said Psyche stammering,  
And looking round, "what say I? like the king  
Who rules the world, he seems to me at least—  
Come, sisters, sit, and let us make good feast!  
My darling and my love ye shall behold  
I doubt not soon, his crispy hair of gold,  
His eyes unseen; and ye shall hear his voice,  
That in my joy ye also may rejoice."

Then did they hold their peace, although indeed  
Her stammering haste they did not fail to heed.  
But at their wondrous royal feast they sat  
Thinking their thoughts, and spoke of this or that  
Between the bursts of music, until when  
The sun was leaving the abodes of men;  
And then must Psyche to her sisters say  
That she was bid, her husband being away,  
To suffer none at night to harbour there,  
No, not the mother that her body bare  
Or father that begat her, therefore they  
Must leave her now, till some still happier day.

And therewithal more precious gifts she brought  
Whereof not e'en in dreams they could have thought  
Things whereof noble stories might be told ;  
And said ; " These matters that you here behold  
Shall be the worst of gifts that you shall have ;  
Farewell, farewell ! and may the high gods save  
Your lives and fame ; and tell our father dear  
Of all the honour that I live in here,  
And how that greater happiness shall come  
When I shall reach a long-enduring home."

Then these, though burning through the night to stay,  
Spake loving words, and went upon their way,  
When weeping she had kissed them ; but they wept  
Such tears as traitors do, for as they stepped  
Over the threshold, in each other's eyes  
They looked, for each was eager to surprise  
The envy that their hearts were filled withal,  
That to their lips came welling up like gall.

" So," said the first, " this palace without folk,  
These wonders done with none to strike a stroke.  
This singing in the air, and no one seen,  
These gifts too wonderful for any queen,  
The trance wherein we both were wrapt away,  
And set down by her golden house to-day—  
—These are the deeds of gods, and not of men ;  
And fortunate the day was to her, when  
Weeping she left the house where we were born,  
And all men deemed her shamed and most forlorn."

Then said the other, reddening in her rage,  
"She is the luckiest one of all this age ;  
And yet she might have told us of her case,  
What god it is that dwelleth in the place,  
Nor sent us forth like beggars from her gate.  
And beggarly, O sister, is our fate,  
Whose husbands wring from miserable hinds  
What the first battle scatters to the winds ;  
While she to us whom from her door she drives  
And makes of no account or honour, gives  
Such wonderful and priceless gifts as these,  
Fit to bedeck the limbs of goddesses !  
And yet who knows but she may get a fall ?  
The strongest tower has not the highest wall,  
Think well of this, when you sit safe at home

By this unto the river were they come,  
Where waited Zephyrus unseen, who cast  
A languor over them that quickly passed  
Into deep sleep, and on the grass they sank ;  
Then straightway did he lift them from the bank,  
And quickly each in her fair house set down,  
Then flew aloft above the sleeping town.

Long in their homes they brooded over this,  
And how that Psyche nigh a goddess is ;  
While all folk deemed that she quite lost had been  
For nought they said of all that they had seen.

But now that night when she, with many a kiss,  
Had told their coming, and of that and this

That happed, he said, "These things, O Love, are well;  
Glad am I that no evil thing befell.

And yet, between thy father's house and me  
Must thou choose now; then either royally  
Shalt thou go home, and wed some king at last,  
And have no harm for all that here has passed;  
Or else, my love, bear as thy brave heart may,  
This loneliness in hope of that fair day,  
Which, by my head, shall come to thee; and then  
Shalt thou be glorious to the sons of men,  
And by my side shalt sit in such estate  
That in all time all men shall sing thy fate."

But with that word such love through her he breathed,  
That round about him her fair arms she wreathed;  
And so with loving passed the night away,  
And with fresh hope came on the fresh May-day.  
And so passed many a day and many a night.  
And weariness was balanced with delight,  
And into such a mind was Psyche brought,  
That little of her father's house she thought,  
But ever of the happy day to come  
When she should go unto her promised home.

Till she that threw the golden apple down  
Upon the board, and lighted up Troy town,  
On dusky wings came flying o'er the place,  
And seeing Psyche with her happy face  
Asleep beneath some fair tree blossoming,  
Into her sleep straight cast an evil thing;

Whereby she dreamed she saw her father laid  
Panting for breath beneath the golden shade  
Of his great bed's embroidered canopy,  
And with his last breath moaning heavily  
Her name and fancied woes ; thereat she woke,  
And this ill dream through all her quiet broke,  
And when next morn her Love from her would go,  
And going, as it was his wont to do,  
Would kiss her sleeping, he must find the tears  
Filling the hollows of her rosy ears  
And wetting half the golden hair that lay  
'Twixt him and her : then did he speak and say,  
“ O Love, why dost thou lie awake and weep,  
Who for content shouldst have good heart to sleep  
This cold hour ere the dawning ? ” Nought she said,  
But wept aloud. Then cried he, “ By my head !  
Whate'er thou wishest I will do for thee ;  
Yea, if it make an end of thee and me.”

“ O Love,” she said, “ I scarce dare ask again,  
Yet is there in mine heart an aching pain  
To know what of my father is become :  
So would I send my sisters to my home,  
Because I doubt indeed they never told  
Of all my honour in this house of gold ;  
And now of them a great oath would I take.”

He said, “ Alas ! and hast thou been awake  
For them indeed ? who in my arms asleep  
Mightst well have been ; for their sakes didst thou  
weep,

Who mightst have smiled to feel my kiss on thee?  
Yet as thou wishest once more shall it be,  
Because my oath constrains me, and thy tears.  
And yet again beware, and make these fears  
Of none avail; nor waver any more,  
I pray thee: for already to the shore  
Of all delights and joys thou drawest nigh."

He spoke, and from the chamber straight did fly  
To highest heaven, and going softly then,  
Wearied the father of all gods and men  
With prayers for Psyche's immortality.

Meantime went Zephyrus across the sea,  
To bring her sisters to her arms again,  
Though of that message little was he fain,  
Knowing their malice and their cankered hearts.

For now these two had thought upon their parts  
And made up a false tale for Psyche's ear;  
For when awaked, to her they drew anear,  
Sobbing, their faces in their hands they hid,  
Nor when she asked them why this thing they did  
Would answer aught, till trembling Psyche said,  
"Nay, nay, what is it? is our father dead?  
Or do ye weep these tears for shame that ye  
Have told him not of my felicity,  
To make me weep amidst my new-found bliss?  
Be comforted, for short the highway is  
To my forgiveness: this day shall ye go

And take him gifts, and tell him all ye know  
Of this my unexpected happy lot."

Amidst fresh sobs one said, "We told him not  
But by good counsel did we hide the thing,  
Deeming it well that he should feel the sting  
For once, than for awhile be glad again,  
And after come to suffer double pain."

"Alas! what mean you, sister?" Psyche said,  
For terror waxing pale as are the dead.  
"O sister, speak!" "Child, by this loving kiss,"  
Spake one of them, "and that remembered bliss  
We dwelt in when our mother was alive,  
Or ever we began with ills to strive,  
By all the hope thou hast to see again  
Our aged father and to soothe his pain,  
I charge thee tell me,—Hast thou seen the thing  
Thou callest Husband?"

Breathless, quivering,  
Psyche cried out, "Alas! what sayest thou?  
What riddles wilt thou speak unto me now?"

"Alas!" she said; "then is it as I thought.  
Sister, in dreadful places have we sought  
To learn about thy case, and thus we found  
A wise man, dwelling underneath the ground  
In a dark awful cave: he told to us  
A horrid tale thereof, and piteous,  
That thou wert wedded to an evil thing,  
A serpent-bodied fiend of poisonous sting,  
Bestial of form, yet therewith lacking not



E'en such a soul as wicked men have got.  
Thus ages long ago the gods made him,  
And set him in a lake hereby to swim ;  
But every hundred years he hath this grace,  
That he may change within this golden place  
Into a fair young man by night alone.  
Alas, my sister, thou hast cause to groan !  
What sayest thou ?—*His words are fair and soft ;  
He raineth loving kisses on me oft,  
Weeping for love ; he tells me of a day  
When from this place we both shall go away,  
And he shall kiss me then no more unseen,  
The while I sit by him a glorious queen —*  
— Alas, poor child ! it pleaseth thee, his kiss ?  
Then must I show thee why he doeth this :  
Because he willeth for a time to save  
Thy body, wretched one ! that he may have  
Both child and mother for his watery hell —  
Ah, what a tale this is for me to tell !

“ Thou prayest us to save thee, and we can ;  
Since for nought else we sought that wise old man,  
Who for great gifts and seeing that of kings  
We both were come, has told us all these things,  
And given us a fair lamp of hallowed oil  
That he has wrought with danger and much toil ;  
And thereto has he added a sharp knife,  
In forging which he well-nigh lost his life,  
About him so the devils of the pit  
Came swarming—O, my sister, hast thou it ?”

Straight from her gown the other one drew out  
The lamp and knife, which Psyche, dumb with doubt  
And misery at once, took in her hand.

Then said her sister, "From this doubtful land  
Thou gav'st us royal gifts a while ago,  
But these we give thee, though they lack for show,  
Shall be to thee a better gift,—thy life.  
Put now in some sure place this lamp and knife,  
And when he sleeps rise silently from bed  
And hold the hallowed lamp above his head,  
And swiftly draw the charmed knife across  
His cursed neck, thou well may'st bear the loss,  
Nor shall he keep his man's shape more, when he  
First feels the iron wrought so mysticly :  
But thou, flee unto us, we have a tale,  
Of what has been thy lot within this vale,  
When we have 'scaped therefrom, which we shall do  
By virtue of strange spells the old man knew.  
Farewell, sweet sister ! here we may not stay,  
Lest in returning he should pass this way ;  
But in the vale we will not fail to wait  
Till thou art loosened from thine evil fate."

Thus went they, and for long they said not aught,  
Fearful lest any should surprise their thought,  
But in such wise had envy conquered fear,  
That they were fain that eve to bide anear  
Their sister's ruined home ; but when they came  
Unto the river, on them fell the same  
Resistless languor they had felt before.

And from the blossoms of that flowery shore  
Their sleeping bodies soon did Zephyr bear,  
For other folk to hatch new ills and care.

But on the ground sat Psyche all alone,  
The lamp and knife beside her, and no moan  
She made, but silent let the long hours go,  
Till dark night closed around her and her woe.

Then trembling she arose, for now drew near  
The time of utter loneliness and fear,  
And she must think of death, who until now  
Had thought of ruined life, and love brought low ;  
And with that thought, tormenting doubt there came,  
And images of some unheard-of shame,  
Until forlorn, entrapped of gods she felt,  
As though in some strange hell her spirit dwelt.

Yet driven by her sisters' words at last,  
And by remembrance of the time now past,  
When she stood trembling, as the oracle  
With all its fearful doom upon her fell,  
She to her hapless wedding-chamber turned,  
And while the waxen tapers freshly burned  
She laid those dread gifts ready to her hand,  
Then quenched the lights, and by the bed did stand,  
Turning these matters in her troubled mind ;  
And sometimes hoped some glorious man to find  
Beneath the lamp, fit bridegroom for a bride  
Like her ; ah, then ! with what joy to his side  
Would she creep back in the dark silent night ;

But whiles she quaked at thought of what a sight  
The lamp might show her ; the hot rush of blood  
The knife might shed upon her as she stood,  
The dread of some pursuit, the hurrying out,  
Through rooms where every sound would seem a shout  
Into the windy night among the trees,  
Where many a changing monstrous sight one sees,  
When nought at all has happed to chill the blood.

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But as among these evil thoughts she stood,  
She heard him coming, and straight crept to bed.  
And felt him touch her with a new-born dread,  
And durst not answer to his words of love.  
But when he slept, she rose that tale to prove.  
And sliding down as softly as might be,  
And moving through the chamber quietly,  
She gat the lamp within her trembling hand,  
And long, debating of these things, did stand  
In that thick darkness, till she seemed to be  
A dweller in some black eternity,  
And what she once had called the world did seem  
A hollow void, a colourless mad dream ;  
For she felt so alone—three times in vain  
She moved her heavy hand, three times again  
It fell adown ; at last throughout the place  
Its flame glared, lighting up her woeful face,  
Whose eyes the silken carpet did but meet,  
Grown strange and awful, and her own wan feet  
As toward the bed she stole ; but come thereto

Back with closed eyes and quivering lips, she threw  
Her lovely head, and strove to think of it,  
While images of fearful things did flit  
Before her eyes ; thus, raising up the hand  
That bore the lamp, one moment did she stand  
As man's time tells it, and then suddenly  
Opened her eyes, but scarce kept back a cry  
At what she saw ; for there before her lay  
The very Love brighter than dawn of day ;  
And as he lay there smiling, her own name  
His gentle lips in sleep began to frame,  
And as to touch her face his hand did move ;  
O then, indeed, her faint heart swelled for love,  
And she began to sob, and tears fell fast  
Upon the bed.—But as she turned at last  
To quench the lamp, there happed a little thing  
That quenched her new delight, for flickering  
The treacherous flame cast on his shoulder fair  
A burning drop ; he woke, and seeing her there  
The meaning of that sad sight knew full well,  
Nor was there need the piteous tale to tell.

Then on her knees she fell with a great cry,  
For in his face she saw the thunder nigh,  
And she began to know what she had done,  
And saw herself henceforth, unloved, alone,  
Pass onward to the grave ; and once again  
She heard the voice she now must love in vain

"Ah, has it come to pass? and hast thou lost  
A life of love, and must thou still be tossed  
One moment in the sun 'twixt night and night?  
And must I lose what would have been delight,  
Untasted yet amidst immortal bliss,  
To wed a soul made worthy of my kiss,  
Set in a frame so wonderfully made?"

"O wavering heart, farewell! be not afraid  
That I with fire will burn thy body fair,  
Or cast thy sweet limbs piecemeal through the air;  
The fates shall work thy punishment alone,  
And thine own memory of our kindness done.

"Alas! what wilt thou do? how shalt thou bear  
The cruel world, the sickening still despair,  
The mocking, curious faces bent on thee,  
When thou hast known what love there is in me?  
O happy only, if thou couldst forget,  
And live unholpen, lonely, loveless yet,  
But untormented through the little span  
That on the earth ye call the life of man.  
Alas! that thou, too fair a thing to die,  
Shouldst so be born to double misery!"

"Farewell! though I, a god, can never know  
How thou canst lose thy pain, yet time will go  
Over thine head, and thou mayst mingle yet  
The bitter and the sweet, nor quite forget,  
Nor quite remember, till these things shall seem  
The wavering memory of a lovely dream."

Therewith he caught his shafts up and his bow,  
And striding through the chambers did he go,  
Light all around him ; and she, wailing sore,  
Still followed after ; but he turned no more,  
And when into the moonlit night he came  
From out her sight he vanished like a flame,  
And on the threshold till the dawn of day  
Through all the changes of the night she lay.

**A**T daybreak when she lifted up her eyes,  
She looked around with heavy dull surprise,  
And rose to enter the fair golden place ;  
But then remembering all her piteous case  
She turned away, lamenting very sore,  
And wandered down unto the river shore ;  
There, at the head of a green pool and deep,  
She stood so long that she forgot to weep,  
And the wild things about the water-side  
From such a silent thing cared not to hide ;  
The dace pushed 'gainst the stream, the dragon-fly,  
With its green-painted wing, went flickering by ;  
The water-hen, the lustred kingfisher,  
Went on their ways and took no heed of her ;  
The little reed birds never ceased to sing,  
And still the eddy, like a living thing,  
Broke into sudden gurgles at her feet.

But 'midst these fair things, on that morning sweet,  
How could she, weary creature, find a place?  
She moved at last, and lifting up her face,  
Gathered her raiment up and cried, "Farewell,  
O fairest lord! and since I cannot dwell  
With thee in heaven, let me now hide my head  
In whatsoever dark place dwell the dead!"

And with that word she leapt into the stream,  
But the kind river even yet did deem  
That she should live, and, with all gentle care,  
Cast her ashore within a meadow fair.  
Upon the other side, where Shepherd Pan  
Sat looking down upon the water wan,  
Goat-legged and merry, who called out, "Fair maid  
Why goest thou hurrying to the feeble shade  
Whence none return? Well do I know thy pain,  
For I am old, and have not lived in vain;  
Thou wilt forget all that within a while,  
And on some other happy youth wilt smile;  
And sure he must be dull indeed if he  
Forget not all things in his ecstasy  
At sight of such a wonder made for him,  
That in that clinging gown makes mine eyes swim,  
Old as I am: but to the god of Love  
Pray now, sweet child, for all things can he move."

Weeping she passed him, but full reverently,  
And well she saw that she was not to die  
Till she had filled the measure of her woe.



So through the meads she passed, half blind and slow,  
And on her sisters somewhat now she thought ;  
And, pondering on the evil they had wrought,  
The veil fell from her, and she saw their guile.

“ Alas !” she said, “ can death make folk so vile ?  
What wonder that the gods are glorious then,  
Who cannot feel the hates and fears of men ?  
Sisters, alas, for what ye used to be !  
Once did I think, whatso might hap to me,  
Still at the worst, within your arms to find  
A haven of pure love ; then were ye kind,  
Then was your joy e’en as my very own—  
And now, and now, if I can be alone  
That is my best : but that can never be,  
For your unkindness still shall stay with me  
When ye are dead—But thou, my love ! my dear !  
Wert thou not kind ?—I should have lost my fear  
Within a little—Yea, and e’en just now  
With angry godhead on thy lovely brow,  
Still thou wert kind—And art thou gone away  
For ever ? I know not, but day by day  
Still will I seek thee till I come to die,  
And nurse remembrance of felicity  
Within my heart, although it wound me sore ;  
For what am I but thine for evermore !”

Thenceforth her back upon the world she turned  
As she had known it ; in her heart there burned  
Such deathless love, that still untired she went :

The huntsman dropping down the woody bent,  
In the still evening, saw her passing by,  
And for her beauty fain would draw anigh,  
But yet durst not ; the shepherd on the down  
Wondering, would shade his eyes with fingers brown,  
As on the hill's brow, looking o'er the lands,  
She stood with straining eyes and clinging hands,  
While the wind blew the raiment from her feet ;  
The wandering soldier her grey eyes would meet,  
That took no heed of him, and drop his own ;  
Like a thin dream she passed the clattering town ;  
On the thronged quays she watched the ships come in  
Patient, amid the strange outlandish din ;  
Unscared she saw the sacked towns' miseries,  
And marching armies passed before her eyes.  
And still of her the god had such a care  
That none might wrong her, though alone and fair.  
Through rough and smooth she wandered many a day,  
Till all her hope had well-nigh passed away.

Meanwhile the sisters, each in her own home,  
Waited the day when outcast she should come  
And ask their pity ; when perchance, indeed,  
They looked to give her shelter in her need,  
And with soft words such faint reproaches take  
As she durst make them for her ruin's sake ;  
But day passed day, and still no Psyche came,  
And while they wondered whether, to their shame,  
Their plot had failed, or gained its end too well,

And Psyche slain, no tale thereof could tell.—  
Amidst these things, the eldest sister lay  
Asleep one evening of a summer day,  
Dreaming she saw the god of Love anigh,  
Who seemed to say unto her lovingly,  
“Hail unto thee, fair sister of my love ;  
Nor fear me for that thou her faith didst prove,  
And found it wanting, for thou, too, art fair,  
Nor is her place filled ; rise, and have no care  
For father or for friends, but go straightway  
Unto the rock where she was borne that day ;  
There, if thou hast a will to be my bride,  
Put thou all fear of horrid death aside,  
And leap from off the cliff, and there will come  
My slaves, to bear thee up and take thee home.  
Haste then, before the summer night grows late,  
For in my house thy beauty I await !”

So spake the dream ; and through the night did sail,  
And to the other sister bore the tale,  
While this one rose, nor doubted of the thing,  
Such deadly pride unto her heart did cling ;  
But by the tapers' light triumphantly,  
Smiling, her mirrored body did she eye,  
Then hastily rich raiment on her cast  
And through the sleeping serving-people passed,  
And looked with changed eyes on the moonlit street,  
Nor scarce could feel the ground beneath her feet.  
But long the time seemed to her, till she came

There where her sister once was borne to shame ;  
And when she reached the bare cliff's rugged brow  
She cried aloud, " O Love, receive me now,  
Who am not all unworthy to be thine !"  
And with that word, her jewelled arms did shine  
Outstretched beneath the moon, and with one breath  
She sprung to meet the outstretched arms of Death,  
The only god that waited for her there,  
And in a gathered moment of despair  
A hideous thing her traitrous life did seem.

But with the passing of that hollow dream  
The other sister rose, and as she might,  
Arrayed herself alone in that still night,  
And so stole forth, and making no delay  
Came to the rock anigh the dawn of day ;  
No warning there her sister's spirit gave,  
No doubt came nigh the fore-doomed soul to save,  
But with a fever burning in her blood,  
With glittering eyes and crimson cheeks she stood  
One moment on the brow, the while she cried,  
" Receive me, Love, chosen to be thy bride  
From all the million women of the world !"  
Then o'er the cliff her wicked limbs were hurled,  
Nor has the language of the earth a name  
For that surprise of terror and of shame.

NOW, midst her wanderings, on a hot noontide,  
Psyche passed down a road, where, on each side  
The yellow cornfields lay, although as yet  
Unto the stalks no sickle had been set ;  
The lark sung over them, the butterfly  
Flickered from ear to ear distractedly,  
The kestrel hung above, the weasel peered  
From out the wheat-stalks on her unafraid,  
Along the road the trembling poppies shed  
On the burnt grass their crumpled leaves and red ;  
Most lonely was it, nothing Psyche knew  
Unto what land of all the world she drew ;  
Aweary was she, faint and sick at heart,  
Bowed to the earth by thoughts of that sad part  
She needs must play : some blue flower from the corn  
That in her fingers erewhile she had borne,  
Now dropped from them, still clung unto her gown ;  
Over the hard way hung her head adown  
Despairingly, but still her weary feet  
Moved on half conscious, her lost love to meet.

So going, at the last she raised her eyes,  
And saw a grassy mound before her rise  
Over the yellow plain, and thereon was  
A marble fane with doors of burnished brass,  
That 'twixt the pillars set about it burned ;  
So thitherward from off the road she turned,  
And soon she heard a rippling water sound,  
And reached a stream that girt the hill around,

Whose green waves wooed her body lovingly ;  
So looking round, and seeing no soul anigh,  
Unclad, she crossed the shallows, and there laid  
Her dusty raiment in the alder-shade,  
And slipped adown into the shaded pool,  
And with the pleasure of the water cool  
Soothed her tired limbs awhile, then with a sigh  
Came forth, and clad her body hastily,  
And up the hill made for the little fane.

But when its threshold now her feet did gain,  
She, looking through the pillars of the shrine,  
Beheld therein a golden image shine  
Of golden Ceres ; then she passed the door,  
And with bowed head she stood awhile before  
The smiling image, striving for some word  
That did not name her lover and her lord,  
Until midst rising tears at last she prayed :

“ O kind one, if while yet I was a maid  
I ever did thee pleasure, on this day  
Be kind to me, poor wanderer on the way,  
Who strive my love upon the earth to meet !  
Then let me rest my weary, doubtful feet  
Within thy quiet house a little while,  
And on my rest if thou wouldst please to smile,  
And send me news of my own love and lord,  
It would not cost thee, lady, many a word.”

But straight from out the shrine a sweet voice came,  
“ O Psyche, though of me thou hast no blame,  
And though indeed thou sparedst not to give

What my soul loved, while happy thou didst live,  
Yet little can I give now unto thee,  
Since thou art rebel, slave, and enemy  
Unto the love-inspiring Queen ; this grace  
Thou hast alone of me, to leave this place  
Free as thou camest, though the lovely one  
Seeks for the sorceress who entrapped her son  
In every land, and has small joy in aught,  
Until before her presence thou art brought."

Then Psyche, trembling at the words she spake,  
Durst answer nought, nor for that counsel's sake  
Could other offerings leave except her tears,  
As now, tormented by the new-born fears  
The words divine had raised in her, she passed  
The brazen threshold once again, and cast  
A dreary hopeless look across the plain,  
Whose golden beauty now seemed nought and vain  
Unto her aching heart ; then down the hill  
She went, and crossed the shallows of the rill,  
And wearily she went upon her way,  
Nor any homestead passed upon that day,  
Nor any hamlet, and at night lay down  
Within a wood, far off from any town.

There, waking at the dawn, did she behold,  
Through the green leaves, a glimmer as of gold,  
And, passing on, amidst an oak-grove found  
A pillared temple gold-adorned and round,  
Whose walls were hung with rich and precious things,

Worthy to be the ransom of great kings ;  
 And in the midst of gold and ivory  
 An image of Queen Juno did she see ;  
 Then her heart swelled within her, and she thought,  
 " Surely the gods hereto my steps have brought,  
 And they will yet be merciful and give  
 Some little joy to me, that I may live  
 Till my Love finds me." Then upon her knees  
 She fell, and prayed, " O Crown of goddesses,  
 I pray thee, give me shelter in this place,  
 Nor turn away from me thy much-loved face,  
 If ever I gave golden gifts to thee  
 In happier times when my right hand was free."

Then from the inmost shrine there came a voice  
 That said, " It is so, well mayst thou rejoice  
 That of thy gifts I yet have memory,  
 Wherefore mayst thou depart forewarned and free ;  
 Since she that won the golden apple lives,  
 And to her servants mighty gifts now gives  
 To find thee out, in whatso land thou art,  
 For thine undoing : loiter not, depart !  
 For what immortal yet shall shelter thee  
 From her that rose from out the unquiet sea ?"

Then Psyche moaned out in her grief and fear,  
 " Alas ! and is there shelter anywhere  
 Upon the green flame-hiding earth ?" said she,  
 " Or yet beneath it is there peace for me ?  
 O Love, since in thine arms I cannot rest,  
 Or lay my weary head upon thy breast,



**Have** pity yet upon thy love forlorn,  
**Make** me as though I never had been born !”

Then wearily she went upon her way,  
And so, about the middle of the day,  
She came before a green and flowery place,  
Walled round about in manner of a chase,  
Whereof the gates as now were open wide ;  
Fair grassy glades and long she saw inside  
Betwixt great trees, down which the unscared deer  
Were playing ; yet a pang of deadly fear,  
She knew not why, shot coldly through her heart,  
And thrice she turned as though she would depart,  
And thrice returned, and in the gateway stood  
With wavering feet : small flowers as red as blood  
Were growing up amid the soft green grass,  
And here and there a fallen rose there was,  
And on the trodden grass a silken lace,  
As though crowned revellers had passed by the place  
The restless sparrows chirped upon the wall  
And faint far music on her ears did fall,  
And from the trees within, the pink-foot doves  
Still told their weary tale unto their loves,  
And all seemed peaceful more than words could say.

Then she, whose heart still whispered, “ Keep away.”  
Was drawn by strong desire unto the place,  
So toward the greenest glade she set her face,  
Murmuring, “ Alas ! and what a wretch am I,  
That I should fear the summer’s greenery !

Yea, and is death now any more an ill,  
When lonely through the world I wander still."

But when she was amidst those ancient groves,  
Whose close green leaves and choirs of moaning doves  
Shut out the world, then so alone she seemed,  
So strange, her former life was but as dreamed ;  
Beside the hopes and fears that drew her on,  
Till so far through that green place she had won,  
That she a rose-hedged garden could behold  
Before a house made beautiful with gold ;  
Which, to her mind beset with that past dream,  
And dim foreshadowings of ill fate, did seem  
That very house, her joy and misery,  
Where that fair sight her longing eyes did see  
They should not see again ; but now the sound  
Of pensive music echoing all around,  
Made all things like a picture, and from thence  
Bewildering odours floating, dulled her sense,  
And killed her fear, and, urged by strong desire  
To see how all should end, she drew yet nigher.  
And o'er the hedge beheld the heads of girls  
Embraced by garlands fresh and orient pearls,  
And heard sweet voices murmuring ; then a thrill  
Of utmost joy all memory seemed to kill  
Of good or evil, and her eager hand  
Was on the wicket, then her feet did stand  
Upon new flowers, the while her dizzied eyes  
Gazed wildly round on half-seen mysteries,  
And wandered from unnoting face to face.

For round a fountain midst the flowery place  
Did she behold full many a minstrel girl ;  
While nigh them, on the grass in giddy whirl,  
Bright raiment and white limbs and sandalled feet  
Flew round in time unto the music sweet,  
Whose strains no more were pensive now nor sad,  
But rather a fresh sound of triumph had ;  
And round the dance were gathered damsels fair,  
Clad in rich robes adorned with jewels rare ;  
Or little hidden by some woven mist,  
That, hanging round them, here a bosom kissed  
And there a knee, or driven by the wind  
About some lily's bowing stem was twined.

But when a little Psyche's eyes grew clear,  
A sight they saw that brought back all her fear  
A hundred-fold, though neither heaven nor earth  
To such a fair sight elsewhere could give birth ;  
Because apart, upon a golden throne  
Of marvellous work, a woman sat alone,  
Watching the dancers with a smiling face,  
Whose beauty sole had lighted up the place.  
A crown there was upon her glorious head,  
A garland round about her girdlestead,  
Where matchless wonders of the hidden sea  
Were brought together and set wonderfully ;  
Naked she was of all else, but her hair  
About her body rippled here and there,  
And lay in heaps upon the golden seat,

And even touched the gold cloth where her feet  
Lay amid roses—ah, how kind she seemed !  
What depths of love from out her grey eyes beamed !

Well might the birds leave singing on the trees  
To watch in peace that crown of goddesses,  
Yet well might Psyche sicken at the sight,  
And feel her feet wax heavy, her head light ;  
For now at last her evil day was come,  
Since she had wandered to the very home  
Of her most bitter cruel enemy.

Half-dead, yet must she turn about to flee,  
But as her eyes back o'er her shoulder gazed,  
And with weak hands her clinging gown she raised,  
And from her lips unwitting came a moan,  
She felt strong arms about her body thrown,  
And, blind with fear, was haled along till she  
Saw floating by her faint eyes dizzily  
That vision of the pearls and roses fresh,  
The golden carpet and the rosy flesh.

Then, as in vain she strove to make some sound,  
A sweet voice seemed to pierce the air around  
With bitter words ; her doom rang in her ears,  
She felt the misery that lacketh tears.  
“ Come hither, damsels, and the pearl behold  
That hath no price ? See now the thrice-tried gold,  
That all men worshipped, that a god would have  
To be his bride ! how like a wretched slave  
She cowers down, and lacketh even voice

To plead her cause ! Come, damsels, and rejoice,  
That now once more the waiting world will move,  
Since she is found, the well-loved soul of love !

“ And thou poor wretch, what god hath led thee here ?  
Art thou so lost in this abyss of fear,  
Thou canst not weep thy misery and shame ?  
Canst thou not even speak thy shameful name ? ”

But even then the flame of fervent love  
In Psyche's tortured heart began to move,  
And gave her utterance, and she said, “ Alas !  
Surely the end of life has come to pass  
For me, who have been bride of very Love,  
Yet love still bides in me, O Seed of Jove,  
For such I know thee ; slay me, nought is lost !  
For had I had the will to count the cost  
And buy my love with all this misery,  
Thus and no otherwise the thing should be.  
Would I were dead, my wretched beauty gone,  
No trouble now to thee or any one ! ”

And with that last word did she hang her head,  
As one who hears not, whatsoe'er is said ;  
But Venus rising with a dreadful cry  
Said, “ O thou fool, I will not let thee die !  
But thou shalt reap the harvest thou hast sown  
And many a day thy wretched lot bemoan.  
Thou art my slave, and not a day shall be  
But I will find some fitting task for thee,  
Nor will I slay thee till thou hop'st again.

What, thinkest thou that utterly in vain  
Jove is my sire, and in despite my will  
That thou canst mock me with thy beauty still?  
Come forth, O strong-armed, punish this new slave,  
That she henceforth a humble heart may have."

All round about the damsels in a ring  
Were drawn to see the ending of the thing,  
And now as Psyche's eyes stared wildly round  
No help in any face of them she found  
As from the fair and dreadful face she turned  
In whose grey eyes such steadfast anger burned ;  
Yet midst her agony she scarcely knew  
What thing it was the goddess bade them do,  
And all the pageant, like a dreadful dream  
Hopeless and long-enduring grew to seem ;  
Yea, when the strong-armed through the crowd did  
break,

Girls like to those, whose close-locked squadron shake  
The echoing surface of the Asian plain,  
And when she saw their threatening hands, in vain  
She strove to speak, so like a dream it was ;  
So like a dream that this should come to pass,  
And 'neath her feet the green earth opened not.

But when her breaking heart again waxed hot  
With dreadful thoughts and prayers unspeakable  
As all their bitter torment on her fell,  
When she her own voice heard, nor knew its sound,  
And like red flame she saw the trees and ground,  
Then first she seemed to know what misery

To helpless folk upon the earth can be.

But while beneath the many moving feet  
The small crushed flowers sent up their odour sweet,  
Above sat Venus, calm, and very fair,  
Her white limbs bared of all her golden hair,  
Into her heart all wrath cast back again,  
As on the terror and the helpless pain  
She gazed with gentle eyes, and unmoved smile ;  
Such as in Cyprus, the fair blossomed isle,  
When on the altar in the summer night  
They pile the roses up for her delight,  
Men see within their hearts, and long that they  
Unto her very body there might pray.

At last to them some dainty sign she made  
To hold their cruel hands, and therewith bade  
To bear her slave new gained from out her sight  
And keep her safely till the morrow's light :  
So her across the sunny sward they led  
With fainting limbs, and heavy downcast head,  
And into some nigh lightless prison cast  
To brood alone o'er happy days long past  
And all the dreadful times that yet should be.

But she being gone, one moment pensively  
The goddess did the distant hills behold,  
Then bade her girls bind up her hair of gold,  
And veil her breast, the very forge of love,  
With raiment that no earthly shuttle wove,  
And 'gainst the hard earth arm her lovely feet :

Then she went forth, some shepherd king to meet  
Deep in the hollow of a shaded vale,  
To make his woes a long-enduring tale.

**B**UT over Psyche, hapless and forlorn,  
Unseen the sun rose on the morrow morn,  
Nor knew she aught about the death of night  
Until her gaoler's torches filled with light  
The dreary place, blinding her unused eyes,  
And she their voices heard that bade her rise ;  
She did their bidding, yet grown faint and pale  
She shrank away and strove her arms to veil  
In her gown's bosom, and to hide from them  
Her little feet within her garment's hem ;  
But mocking her, they brought her thence away,  
And led her forth into the light of day,  
And brought her to a marble cloister fair  
Where sat the queen on her adorned chair,  
But she, as down the sun-streaked place they came,  
Cried out, " Haste ! ye, who lead my grief and shame."  
And when she stood before her trembling, said,  
" Although within a palace thou wast bred  
Yet dost thou carry but a slavish heart,  
And fitting is it thou shouldst learn thy part,  
And know the state whereunto thou art brought ;  
Now, heed what yesterday thy folly taught,



And set thyself to-day my will to do ;  
Ho ye, bring that which I commanded you."

Then forth came two, and each upon her back  
Bore up with pain a huge half-bursten sack,  
Which, setting down, they opened on the floor,  
And from their hempen mouths a stream did pour  
Of mingled seeds, and grain, peas, pulse, and wheat,  
Poppies and millet, and coriander sweet,  
And many another brought from far-off lands,  
Which mingling more with swift and ready hands  
They piled into a heap confused and great.

And then said Venus, rising from her seat,  
"Slave, here I leave thee, but before the night  
These mingled seeds thy hands shall set aright,  
All laid in heaps, each after its own kind,  
And if in any heap I chance to find  
An alien seed ; thou knowest since yesterday  
How disobedient slaves the forfeit pay."

Therewith she turned and left the palace fair  
And from its outskirts rose into the air,  
And flew until beneath her lay the sea,  
Then, looking on its green waves lovingly,  
Somewhat she dropped, and low adown she flew  
Until she reached the temple that she knew  
Within a sunny bay of her fair isle.

But Psyche sadly labouring all the while  
With hopeless heart felt the swift hours go by,

And knowing well what bitter mockery  
Lay in that task, yet did she what she might  
That something should be finished ere the night,  
And she a little mercy yet might ask ;  
But the first hours of that long feverish task  
Passed amid mocks ; for oft the damsels came  
About her, and made merry with her shame,  
And laughed to see her trembling eagerness,  
And how, with some small lappet of her dress,  
She winnowed out the wheat, and how she bent  
Over the millet, hopelessly intent ;  
And how she guarded well some tiny heap  
But just begun, from their long raiments' sweep ;  
And how herself, with girt gown, carefully  
She went betwixt the heaps that 'gan to lie  
Along the floor ; though they were small enow,  
When shadows lengthened and the sun was low ;  
But at the last these left her labouring,  
Not daring now to weep, lest some small thing  
Should 'scape her blinded eyes, and soon far off  
She heard the echoes of their careless scoff.

Longer the shades grew, quicker sank the sun,  
Until at last the day was well-nigh done,  
And every minute did she think to hear  
The fair Queen's dreaded footsteps drawing near ;  
But Love, that moves the earth, and skies, and sea,  
Beheld his old love in her misery,  
And wrapped her heart in sudden gentle sleep ;  
And meanwhile caused unnumbered ants to creep

About her, and they wrought so busily  
That all, ere sundown, was as it should be,  
And homeward went again the kingless folk.

Bewildered with her joy again she woke,  
But scarce had time the unseen hands to bless,  
That thus had helped her utter feebleness,  
Ere Venus came, fresh from the watery way,  
Panting with all the pleasure of the day ;  
But when she saw the ordered heaps, her smile  
Faded away, she cried out, "Base and vile  
Thou art indeed, this labour fitteth thee ;  
But now I know thy feigned simplicity,  
Thine inward cunning, therefore hope no more,  
Since thou art furnished well with hidden lore,  
To 'scape thy due reward, if any day  
Without some task accomplished, pass away !"

So with a frown she passed on, muttering,  
"Nought have I done, to-morrow a new thing."

So the next morning Psyche did they lead  
Unto a terrace o'er a flowery mead,  
Where Venus sat, hid from the young sun's rays,  
Upon the fairest of all summer days ;  
She pointed o'er the meads as they drew nigh,  
And said, "See how that stream goes glittering by,  
And on its banks my golden sheep now pass,  
Cropping sweet mouthfuls of the flowery grass ;  
If thou, O cunning slave, to-day art fain  
To save thyself from well-remembered pain,

Put forth a little of thy hidden skill,  
And with their golden fleece thy bosom fill ;  
Yet make no haste, but ere the sun is down  
Cast it before my feet from out thy gown ;  
Surely thy labour is but light to-day."

Then sadly went poor Psyche on her way,  
Wondering wherein the snare lay, for she knew  
No easy thing it was she had to do ;  
Nor had she failed indeed to note the smile  
Wherewith the goddess praised her for the guile  
That she, unhappy, lacked so utterly.

Amidst these thoughts she crossed the flowery lea,  
And came unto the glittering river's side ;  
And, seeing it was neither deep nor wide,  
She drew her sandals off, and to the knee  
Girt up her gown, and by a willow-tree  
Went down into the water, and but sank  
Up to mid-leg therein ; but from the bank  
She scarce had gone three steps, before a voice  
Called out to her, "Stay, Psyche, and rejoice  
That I am here to help thee, a poor reed,  
The soother of the loving hearts that bleed,  
The pourer forth of notes, that oft have made  
The weak man strong, and the rash man afraid.

"Sweet child, when by me now thy dear foot trod,  
I knew thee for the loved one of our god ;  
Then prithee take my counsel in good part ;  
Go to the shore again, and rest thine heart  
In sleep awhile, until the sun get low,

And then across the river shalt thou go  
And find these evil creatures sleeping fast,  
And on the bushes whereby they have passed  
Much golden wool ; take what seems good to thee,  
And ere the sun sets go back easily.  
But if within that mead thou sett'st thy feet  
While yet they wake, an ill death shalt thou meet,  
For they are of a cursed man-hating race,  
Bred by a giant in a lightless place."

But at these words soft tears filled Psyche's eyes  
As hope of love within her heart did rise ;  
And when she saw she was not helpless yet  
Her old desire she would not quite forget ;  
But turning back, upon the bank she lay  
In happy dreams till nigh the end of day ;  
Then did she cross and gather of the wool,  
And with her bosom and her gown-skirt full  
Came back to Venus at the sun-setting ;  
But she afar off saw it glistening  
And cried aloud, "Go, take the slave away,  
And keep her safe for yet another day,  
And on the morning will I think again  
Of some fresh task, since with so little pain  
She doeth what the gods find hard enow ;  
For since the winds were pleased this waif to blow  
Unto my door, a fool I were indeed,  
If I should fail to use her for my need."

So her they led away from that bright sun,  
Now scarce more hopeful that the task was done,

Since by those bitter words she knew full well  
Another tale the coming day would tell.

But the next morn upon a turret high,  
Where the wind kissed her raiment lovingly,  
Stood Venus waiting her ; and when she came  
She said, " O slave, thy city's very shame,  
Lift up thy cunning eyes, and looking hence  
Shalt thou behold betwixt these battlements,  
A black and barren mountain set aloof  
From the green hills, shaped like a palace roof.  
Ten leagues from hence it lieth, toward the north,  
And from its rocks a fountain wellet forth,  
Black like itself, and floweth down its side,  
And in a while part into Styx doth glide,  
And part into Cocytus runs away ,  
Now coming thither by the end of day,  
Fill me this ewer from out the awful stream ;  
Such task a sorceress like thee will deem  
A little matter ; bring it not to pass,  
And if thou be not made of steel or brass,  
To-morrow shalt thou find the bitterest day  
Thou yet hast known, and all be sport and play  
To what thy heart in that hour shall endure—  
Behold, I swear it, and my word is sure !"

She turned therewith to go down toward the sea,  
To meet her lover, who from Thessaly  
Was come from some well-foughten field of war.

But Psyche, wandering wearily afar,  
Reached the bare foot of that black rock at last,  
And sat there grieving for the happy past,  
For surely now, she thought, no help could be,  
She had but reached the final misery,  
Nor had she any counsel but to weep.

For not alone the place was very steep,  
And craggy beyond measure, but she knew  
What well it was that she was driven to,  
The dreadful water that the gods swear by,  
For there on either hand, as one draws nigh,  
Are long-necked dragons ready for the spring,  
And many another monstrous nameless thing,  
The very sight of which is well-nigh death ;  
Then the black water as it goes crieth,  
“ Fly, wretched one, before you come to die !  
Die, wretched man ! I will not let you fly !  
How have you heart to come before me here ?  
You have no heart, your life is turned to fear ! ”  
Till the wretch falls adown with whirling brain,  
And far below the sharp rocks end his pain.

Well then might Psyche wail her wretched fate,  
And strive no more, but sitting weep and wait  
Alone in that black land for kindly death,  
With weary sobbing, wasting life and breath ;  
But o'er her head there flew the bird of Jove,  
The bearer of his servant, friend of Love,  
Who, when he saw her, straightway towards her flew,  
And asked her why she wept, and when he knew,

And who she was, he said, "Cease all thy fear,  
For to the black waves I thy ewer will bear,  
And fill it for thee ; but, remember me,  
When thou art come unto thy majesty."

Then straight he flew, and through the dragon's wings  
Went carelessly, nor feared their clatterings,  
But set the ewer, filled, in her right hand,  
And on that day saw many another land.

Then Psyche through the night toiled back again,  
And as she went, she thought, " Ah ! all is vain,  
For though once more I just escape indeed,  
Yet hath she many another wile at need ;  
And to these days when I my life first learn,  
With unavailing longing shall I turn,  
When this that seemeth now so horrible  
Shall then seem but the threshold of her hell.  
Alas ! what shall I do ? for even now  
In sleep I see her pitiless white brow,  
And hear the dreadful sound of her commands.  
While with my helpless body and bound hands  
I tremble underneath the cruel whips ;  
And oft for dread of her, with quivering lips  
I wake, and waking know the time draws nigh  
When nought shall wake me from that misery—  
Behold, O Love, because of thee I live,  
Because of thee, with these things still I strive."



NOW with the risen sun her weary feet  
The late-strewn roses of the floor did meet  
Upon the marble threshold of the place ;  
But she being brought before the matchless face,  
Fresh with the new life of another day,  
Beheld her wondering, for the goddess lay  
With half-shut eyes upon her golden bed,  
And when she entered scarcely turned her head,  
But smiling spake, "The gods are good to thee,  
Nor shalt thou always be mine enemy ;  
But one more task I charge thee with to-day,  
Now unto Proserpine take thou thy way,  
And give this golden casket to her hands,  
And pray the fair Queen of the gloomy lands  
To fill the void shell with that beauty rare  
That long ago as queen did set her there ;  
Nor needest thou to fail in this new thing,  
Who hast to-day the heart and wit to bring  
This dreadful water, and return alive ;  
And, that thou may'st the more in this thing strive,  
If thou returnest I will show at last  
My kindness unto thee, and all the past  
Shalt thou remember as an ugly dream."

And now at first to Psyche did it seem  
Her heart was softening to her, and the thought  
Swelled her full heart to sobbing, and it brought  
Into her yearning eyes half-happy tears :

But on her way cold thoughts and dreadful fears  
Rose in her heart, for who indeed could teach  
A living soul that dread abode to reach  
And yet return? and then once more it seemed  
The hope of mercy was but lightly dreamed,  
And she remembered that triumphant smile,  
And needs must think, "This is the final wile,  
Alas! what trouble must a goddess take  
So weak a thing as this poor heart to break.

"See now this tower! from off its top will I  
Go quick to Proserpine—ah, good to die!  
Rather than hear those shameful words again,  
And bear that unimaginable pain  
Which she has hoarded for to-morrow morn;  
Now is the ending of my life forlorn!  
O Love, farewell, thou seest all hope is dead,  
Thou seest what torments on my wretched head  
Thy bitter mother doth not cease to heap;  
Farewell, O Love, for thee and life I weep.  
Alas, my foolish heart! alas, my sin!  
Alas, for all the love I could not win!"

Now was this tower both old enough and grey,  
Built by some king forgotten many a day,  
And no man dwelt there, now that bitter war  
From that bright land had long been driven afar;  
There now she entered, trembling and afraid;  
But 'neath her doubtful steps the dust long laid  
In utter rest, rose up into the air,  
And wavered in the wind that down the stair

Rushed to the door ; then she drew back a pace,  
Moved by the coolness of the lonely place  
That for so long had seen no ray of sun.

Then shuddering did she hear these words begun,  
Like a wind's moaning voice, " Have thou no fear  
The hollow words of one long slain to hear !  
Thou livest, and thy hope is not yet dead,  
And if thou heedest me, thou well may'st tread  
The road to hell, and yet return again.

" For thou must go o'er many a hill and plain  
Until to Sparta thou art come at last,  
And when the ancient city thou hast passed  
A mountain shalt thou reach, that men now call  
Mount Tænarus, that riseth like a wall  
'Twixt plain and upland, therein shalt thou find  
The wide mouth of a cavern huge and blind,  
Wherein there cometh never any sun,  
Whose dreadful darkness all things living shun ;  
This shun thou not, but yet take care to have  
Three honey-cakes thy soul alive to save,  
And in thy mouth a piece of money set,  
Then through the dark go boldly, and forget  
The stories thou hast heard of death and hell,  
And heed my words, and then shall all be well.

" For when thou hast passed through that cavern  
blind,

A place of dim grey meadows shalt thou find,  
Wherethrough to inmost hell a path doth lead,  
Which follow thou, with diligence and heed ;

For as thou goest there, thou soon shalt see  
Two men like peasants loading painfully  
A fallen ass ; these unto thee will call  
To help them, but give thou no heed at all,  
But pass them swiftly ; and then soon again  
Within a shed three crones shalt thou see plain  
Busily weaving, who shall bid thee leave  
The road and fill their shuttles while they weave,  
But slacken not thy steps for all their prayers,  
For these are shadows only, and set snares.

“ At last thou comest to a water wan,  
And at the bank shall be the ferryman  
Surly and grey ; and when he asketh thee  
Of money for thy passage, hastily  
Show him thy mouth, and straight from off thy lip  
The money he will take, and in his ship  
Embark thee and set forward ; but beware,  
For on thy passage is another snare ;  
From out the waves a grisly head shall come,  
Most like thy father thou hast left at home,  
And pray for passage long and piteously,  
But on thy life of him have no pity,  
Else art thou lost ; also thy father lives,  
And in the temples of the high gods gives  
Great daily gifts for thy returning home.

“ When thou unto the other side art come,  
A palace shalt thou see of fiery gold,  
And by the door thereof shalt thou behold  
An ugly triple monster, that shall yell

For thine undoing ; now behold him well,  
And into each mouth of him cast a cake,  
And no more heed of thee then shall he take,  
And thou may'st pass into a glorious hall  
Where many a wonder hangs upon the wall ;  
But far more wonderful than anything  
The fair slim consort of the gloomy King,  
Arrayed all royally shalt thou behold,  
Who sitting on a carven throne of gold,  
Whene'er thou enterest shall rise up to thee,  
And bid thee welcome there most lovingly,  
And pray thee on a royal bed to sit,  
And share her feast ; yet eat thou not of it,  
But sitting on the ground eat bread alone,  
Then do thy message kneeling by her throne ;  
And when thou hast the gift, return with speed ;  
The sleepy dog of thee shall take no heed,  
The ferryman shall bear thee on thy way  
Without more words, and thou shalt see the day  
Unharm'd if that dread box thou openest not ;  
But if thou dost, then death shall be thy lot.

“ O beautiful, when safe thou com'st again,  
Remember me, who lie here in such pain  
Unburied ; set me in some tomb of stone.  
When thou hast gathered every little bone ;  
But never shalt thou set thereon a name,  
Because my ending was with grief and shame,  
Who was a Queen like thee long years ago,

And in this tower so long have lain alone."

Then, pale and full of trouble, Psyche went  
Bearing the casket, and her footsteps bent  
To Lacedæmon, and thence found her way  
To Tænarus, and there the golden day  
For that dark cavern did she leave behind ;  
Then, going boldly through it, did she find  
The shadowy meads which that wide way ran through,  
Under a seeming sky 'twixt grey and blue ;  
No wind blew there, there was no bird or tree,  
Or beast, and dim grey flowers she did but see  
That never faded in that changeless place,  
And if she had but seen a living face  
Most strange and bright she would have thought it there,  
Or if her own face, troubled yet so fair,  
The still pools by the road-side could have shown  
The dimness of that place she might have known ;  
But their dull surface cast no image back,  
For all but dreams of light that land did lack.

So on she passed, still noting every thing,  
Nor yet had she forgotten there to bring  
The honey-cakes and money : in a while  
She saw those shadows striving hard to pile  
The bales upon the ass, and heard them call,  
"O woman, help us ! for our skill is small  
And we are feeble in this place indeed ;"  
But swiftly did she pass, nor gave them heed,  
Though after her from far their cries they sent.

Then a long way adown that road she went.  
Not seeing aught, till, as the Shade had said,  
She came upon three women in a shed  
Busily weaving, who cried, "Daughter, leave  
The beaten road a while, and as we weave  
Fill thou our shuttles with these endless threads,  
For here our eyes are sleepy, and our heads  
Are feeble in this miserable place."  
But for their words she did but mend her pace,  
Although her heart beat-quick as she passed by.

Then on she went, until she could espy  
The wan, grey river lap the leaden bank  
Wherefrom there sprouted sparsely sedges rank,  
And there the road had end in that sad boat  
Wherein the dead men unto Minos float ;  
There stood the ferryman, who now, seeing her, said,  
"O living soul, that thus among the dead  
Hast come, on whatso errand, without fear,  
Know thou that penniless none passes here ;  
Of all the coins that rich men have on earth  
To buy the dreadful folly they call mirth,  
But one they keep when they have passed the grave  
That o'er this stream a passage they may have ;  
And thou, though living, art but dead to me,  
Who here, immortal, see mortality  
Pass, stripped of this last thing that men desire  
Unto the changeless meads or changeless fire."  
Speechless she shewed the money on her lip

Which straight he took, and set her in the ship,  
And then the wretched, heavy oars he threw  
Into the rowlocks and the flood they drew ;  
Silent, with eyes that looked beyond her face,  
He laboured, and they left the dreary place.

But midmost of that water did arise  
A dead man, pale, with ghastly staring eyes  
That somewhat like her father still did seem,  
But in such wise as figures in a dream ;  
Then with a lamentable voice it cried,  
“O daughter, I am dead, and in this tide  
For ever shall I drift, an unnamed thing,  
Who was thy father once, a mighty king,  
Unless thou take some pity on me now,  
And bid the ferryman turn here his prow,  
That I with thee to some abode may cross ;  
And little unto thee will be the loss,  
And unto me the gain will be to come  
To such a place as I may call a home,  
Being now but dead and empty of delight,  
And set in this sad place 'twixt dark and light.”

Now at these words the tears ran down apace  
For memory of the once familiar face,  
And those old days, wherein, a little child  
’Twixt awe and love beneath those eyes she smiled ;  
False pity moved her very heart, although  
The guile of Venus she failed not to know,  
But tighter round the casket clasped her hands,  
And shut her eyes, remembering the commands



Of that dead queen : so safe to land she came.

And there in that grey country, like a flame  
Before her eyes rose up the house of gold,  
And at the gate she met the beast threefold,  
Who ran to meet her open-mouthed, but she  
Unto his jaws the cakes cast cunningly,  
But trembling much ; then on the ground he lay  
Lolling his heads, and let her go her way ;  
And so she came into the mighty hall,  
And saw those wonders hanging on the wall,  
That all with pomegranates was covered o'er  
In memory of the meal on that sad shore,  
Whereby fair Enna was bewept in vain,  
And this became a kingdom and a chain.

But on a throne, the Queen of all the dead  
She saw therein with gold-embracéd head,  
In royal raiment, beautiful and pale ;  
Then with slim hands her face did Psyche veil  
In worship of her, who said, " Welcome here,  
O messenger of Venus ! thou art dear  
To me thyself indeed, for of thy grace  
And loveliness we know e'en in this place ;  
Rest thee then, fair one, on this royal bed  
And with some dainty food shalt thou be fed ;  
Ho, ye who wait, bring in the tables now !"  
Therewith were brought things glorious of show  
On cloths and tables royally beseen,  
By damsels each one fairer than a queen,

The very latchets of whose shoes were worth  
The royal crown of any queen on earth ;  
But when upon them Psyche looked, she saw  
That all these dainty matters without flaw  
Were strange of shape and of strange-blended hues  
So every cup and plate did she refuse  
Those lovely hands brought to her, and she said,  
“ O Queen, to me amidst my awe and dread  
These things are nought, my message is not done,  
So let me rest upon this cold grey stone,  
And while my eyes no higher than thy feet  
Are lifted, eat the food that mortals eat.”

Therewith upon the floor she sat her down  
And from the folded bosom of her gown  
Drew forth her bread and ate, while with cold eyes  
Regarding her 'twixt anger and surprise,  
The Queen sat silent for awhile, then spoke,  
“ Why art thou here, wisest of living folk ?  
Depart in haste, lest thou shouldst come to be  
Thyself a helpless thing and shadowy !  
Give me the casket then, thou need'st not say  
Wherefore thou thus hast passed the awful way ;  
Bide there, and for thy mistress shalt thou have  
The charm that beauty from all change can save.”

Then Psyche rose, and from her trembling hand  
Gave her the casket, and awhile did stand  
Alone within the hall, that changing light  
From burning streams, and shadowy waves of night  
Made strange and dread, till to her, standing there

The world began to seem no longer fair,  
Life no more to be hoped for, but that place  
The peaceful goal of all the hurrying race,  
The house she must return to on some day.

Then sighing scarcely could she turn away  
When with the casket came the Queen once more,  
And said, "Haste now to leave this shadowy shore  
Before thou changest ; even now I see  
Thine eyes are growing strange, thou look'st on me  
E'en as the linnet looks upon the snake.  
Behold, thy wisely-guarded treasure take,  
And let thy breath of life no longer move  
The shadows with the memories of past love."

But Psyche at that name, with quickened heart  
Turned eagerly, and hastened to depart  
Bearing that burden, hoping for the day ;  
Harmless, asleep, the triple monster lay,  
The ferryman did set her in his boat  
Unquestioned, and together did they float  
Over the leaden water back again :  
Nor saw she more those women bent with pain  
Over their weaving, nor the fallen ass,  
But swiftly up the grey road did she pass  
And well-nigh now was come into the day  
By hollow Tænarus, but o'er the way  
The wings of Envy brooded all unseen ;  
Because indeed the cruel and fair Queen  
Knew well how she had sped ; so in her breast,

Against the which the dreadful box was pressed,  
Grew up at last this foolish, harmful thought.

“Behold how far this beauty I have brought  
To give unto my bitter enemy ;  
Might I not still a very goddess be  
If this were mine which goddesses desire ,  
Yea, what if this hold swift consuming fire,  
Why do I think it good for me to live,  
That I my body once again may give  
Into her cruel hands—come death ! come life !  
And give me end to all the bitter strife !”

Therewith down by the wayside did she sit  
And turned the box round, long regarding it ;  
But at the last, with trembling hands, undid  
The clasp, and fearfully raised up the lid ;  
But what was there she saw not, for her head  
Fell back, and nothing she remembered  
Of all her life, yet nought of rest she had,  
The hope of which makes hapless mortals glad ;  
For while her limbs were sunk in deadly sleep  
Most like to death, over her heart 'gan creep  
Ill dreams ; so that for fear and great distress  
She would have cried, but in her helplessness  
Could open not her mouth, or frame a word ;  
Although the threats of mocking things she heard,  
And seemed, amidst new forms of horror bound,  
To watch strange endless armies moving round,  
With all their sleepless eyes still fixed on her,  
Who from that changeless place should never stir.

Moveless she lay, and in that dreadful sleep  
Scarce had the strength some few slow tears to weep.

And there she would have lain for evermore,  
A marble image on the shadowy shore  
In outward seeming, but within oppressed  
With torments, knowing neither hope nor rest  
But as she lay the Phoenix flew along  
Going to Egypt, and knew all her wrong,  
And pitied her, beholding her sweet face,  
And flew to Love and told him of her case ;  
And Love, in guerdon of the tale he told,  
Changed all the feathers of his neck to gold,  
And he flew on to Egypt glad at heart.  
But Love himself gat swiftly for his part  
To rocky Tænarus, and found her there  
Laid half a furlong from the outer air.

But at that sight out burst the smothered flame  
Of love, when he remembered all her shame,  
The stripes, the labour, and the wretched fear,  
And kneeling down he whispered in her ear,  
“Rise, Psyche, and be mine for evermore,  
For evil is long tarrying on this shore.”  
Then when she heard him, straightway she arose,  
And from her fell the burden of her woes ;  
And yet her heart within her well-nigh broke,  
When she from grief to happiness awoke ;  
And loud her sobbing was in that grey place,

And with sweet shame she covered up her face.

But her dear hands, all wet with tears, he kissed,  
And taking them about each dainty wrist  
Drew them away, and in a sweet voice said,  
"Raise up again, O Psyche, that dear head,  
And of thy simpleness have no more shame ;  
Thou hast been tried, and cast away all blame  
Into the sea of woes that thou didst bear,  
The bitter pain, the hopelessness, the fear—  
Holpen a little, loved with boundless love  
Amidst them all—but now the shadows move  
Fast toward the west, earth's day is well-nigh done,  
One toil thou hast yet ; by to-morrow's sun  
Kneel the last time before my mother's feet,  
Thy task accomplished ; and my heart, O sweet,  
Shall go with thee to ease thy toilsome way :  
Farewell awhile ! but that so glorious day  
I promised thee of old, now cometh fast,  
When even hope thy soul aside shall cast,  
Amidst the joy that thou shalt surely win."

So saying, all that sleep he shut within  
The dreadful casket, and aloft he flew,  
But slowly she unto the cavern drew  
Scarce knowing if she dreamed, and so she came  
Unto the earth where yet the sun did flame  
Low down between the pine-trunks, tall and red,  
And with its last beams kissed her golden head.

WITH what words Love unto the Father prayed  
I know not, nor what deeds the balance  
weighed ;

But this I know, that he prayed not in vain,  
And Psyche's life the heavenly crown shall gain ;  
So round about the messenger was sent  
To tell immortals of their King's intent,  
And bid them gather to the Father's hall.

But while they got them ready at his call,  
On through the night was Psyche toiling still,  
To whom no pain nor weariness seemed ill  
Since now once more she knew herself beloved ;  
But when the unresting world again had moved  
Round into golden day, she came again  
To that fair place where she had borne such pain,  
And flushed and joyful in despite her fear,  
Unto the goddess did she draw anear,  
And knelt adown before her golden seat,  
Laying the fatal casket at her feet ;  
Then at the first no word the Sea-born said,  
But looked afar over her golden head,  
Pondering upon the mighty deeds of fate ;  
While Psyche still, as one who well may wait,  
Knelt, calm and motionless, nor said a word,  
But ever thought of her sweet lovesome lord.

At last the Queen said, " Girl, I bid thee rise,  
For now hast thou found favour in mine eyes ;

And I repent me of the misery  
That in this place thou hast endured of me,  
Although because of it, thy joy indeed  
Shall now be more, that pleasure is thy meed."

Then bending, on the forehead did she kiss  
Fair Psyche, who turned red for shame and bliss ;  
But Venus smiled again on her, and said,  
"Go now, and bathe, and be as well arrayed  
As thou shouldst be, to sit beside my son ;  
I think thy life on earth is well-nigh done."

So thence once more was Psyche led away,  
And cast into no prison on that day,  
But brought unto a bath beset with flowers,  
Made dainty with a fount's sweet-smelling showers,  
And there being bathed, e'en in such fair attire  
As veils the glorious Mother of Desire  
Her limbs were veiled, then in the wavering shade,  
Amidst the sweetest garden was she laid,  
And while the damsels round her watch did keep,  
At last she closed her weary eyes in sleep,  
And woke no more to earth, for ere the day  
Had yet grown late, once more asleep she lay  
Within the West Wind's mighty arms, nor woke  
Until the light of heaven upon her broke,  
And on her trembling lips she felt the kiss  
Of very Love, and mortal yet, for bliss  
Must fall a-weeping. O for me! that I,  
Who late have told her woe and misery,



Must leave untold the joy unspeakable  
That on her tender wounded spirit fell !  
Alas ! I try to think of it in vain,  
My lyre is but attuned to tears and pain,  
How shall I sing the never-ending day ?

Led by the hand of Love she took her way  
Unto a vale beset with heavenly trees,  
Where all the gathered gods and goddesses  
Abode her coming ; but when Psyche saw  
The Father's face, she fainting with her awe  
Had fallen, but that Love's arm held her up.

Then brought the cup-bearer a golden cup,  
And gently set it in her slender hand,  
And while in dread and wonder she did stand,  
The Father's awful voice smote on her ear,  
" Drink now, O beautiful, and have no fear !  
For with this draught shalt thou be born again.  
And live for ever free from care and pain."

Then, pale as privet, took she heart to drink,  
And therewithal most strange new thoughts did think,  
And unknown feelings seized her, and there came  
Sudden remembrance, vivid as a flame,  
Of everything that she had done on earth,  
Although it all seemed changed in weight and worth,  
Small things becoming great, and great things small ;  
And godlike pity touched her therewithal  
For her old self, for sons of men that die ;

And that sweet new-born immortality  
Now with full love her rested spirit fed.

Then in that concourse did she lift her head,  
And stood at last a very goddess there,  
And all cried out at seeing her grown so fair.

So while in heaven quick passed the time away,  
About the ending of that lovely day,  
Bright shone the low sun over all the earth  
For joy of such a wonderful new birth.

OR e'er his tale was done, night held the earth ;  
Yea, the brown bird grown bold, as sounds of  
mirth

Grew faint and scanty, now his tale had done,  
And by his mate abode the next day's sun ;  
And in those old hearts did the story move  
Remembrance of the mighty deeds of love,  
And with these thoughts did hopes of life arise,  
Till tears unseen were in their ancient eyes,  
And in their yearning hearts unspoken prayers,  
And idle seemed the world with all its cares.

Few words they said ; the balmy odorous wind  
Wandered about, some resting-place to find ;  
The young leaves rustled 'neath its gentle breath,  
And here and there some blossom burst his sheath,  
Adding unnoticed fragrance to the night ;  
But, as they pondered, a new golden light  
Streamed over the green garden, and they heard  
Sweet voices sing some ancient poet's word  
In praise of May, and then in sight there came  
The minstrels' figures underneath the flame  
Of scented torches passing 'twixt the trees,  
And soon the dusky hall grew bright with these,  
And therewithal they put all thought away,  
And midst the tinkling harps drank deep to May.

**T**HROUGH many changes had the May-tide  
passed,

The hope of summer oft had been o'ercast,  
Ere midst the gardens they once more were met ;  
But now the full-leaved trees might well forget  
The changeful agony of doubtful spring,  
For summer pregnant with so many a thing  
Was at the door ; right hot had been the day  
Which they amid the trees had passed away,  
And now betwixt the tulip beds they went  
Unto the hall, and thoughts of days long spent  
Gathered about them, as some blossom's smell  
Unto their hearts familiar tales did tell.

But when they well were settled in the hall,  
And now behind the trees the sun 'gan fall,  
And they as yet no history had heard,  
Laurence, the Swabian priest, took up the word,  
And said, " Ye know from what has gone before,  
That in my youth I followed mystic lore,  
And many books I read in seeking it,  
And through my memory this same eve doth flit  
A certain tale I found in one of these,  
Long ere mine eyes had looked upon the seas ;  
It made me shudder in the times gone by,  
When I believed in many a mystery  
I thought divine, that now I think, forsooth,  
Men's own fears made, to fill the place of truth  
Within their foolish hearts ; short is the tale,  
And therefore will the better now avail  
To fill the space before the night comes on,  
And unto rest once more the world is won.

## THE WRITING ON THE IMAGE.

## ARGUMENT.

How on an image that stood anciently in Rome were written certain words, which none understood, until a Scholar, coming there, knew their meaning, and thereby discovered great marvels, but withal died miserably.

I N half-forgotten days of old,  
As by our fathers we were told,  
Within the town of Rome there stood  
An image cut of cornel wood,  
And on the upraised hand of it  
Men might behold these letters writ :  
“ PERCUTE HIC :” which is to say,  
In that tongue that we speak to-day,  
“ *Strike here !*” nor yet did any know  
The cause why this was written so.

Thus in the middle of the square,  
In the hot sun and summer air,  
The snow-drift and the driving rain,  
That image stood, with little pain,  
For twice a hundred years and ten ;

While many a band of striving men  
Were driven betwixt woe and mirth  
Swiftly across the weary earth,  
From nothing unto dark nothing :  
And many an emperor and king,  
Passing with glory or with shame,  
Left little record of his name,  
And no remembrance of the face  
Once watched with awe for gifts or grace

Fear little, then, I counsel you,  
What any son of man can do ;  
Because a log of wood will last  
While many a life of man goes past,  
And all is over in short space.

Now so it chanced that to this place  
There came a man of Sicily,  
Who when the image he did see,  
Knew full well who, in days of yore,  
Had set it there ; for much strange lore,  
In Egypt and in Babylon,  
This man with painful toil had won ;  
And many secret things could do ;  
So verily full well he knew  
That master of all sorcery  
Who wrought the thing in days gone by,  
And doubted not that some great spell  
It guarded, but could nowise tell  
What it might be. So, day by day,

Still would he loiter on the way,  
And watch the image carefully,  
Well mocked of many a passer-by.

And on a day he stood and gazed  
Upon the slender finger, raised  
Against a doubtful cloudy sky,  
Nigh noontide ; and thought, " Certainly  
The master who made thee so fair  
By wondrous art, had not stopped there,  
But made thee speak, had he not thought  
That thereby evil might be brought  
Upon his spell." But as he spoke,  
From out a cloud the noon sun broke  
With watery light, and shadows cold :  
Then did the Scholar well behold  
How, from that finger carved to tell  
Those words, a short black shadow fell  
Upon a certain spot of ground,  
And thereon, looking all around  
And seeing none heeding, went straightway  
Whereas the finger's shadow lay,  
And with his knife about the place  
A little circle did he trace ;  
Then home he turned with throbbing head.  
And forthright gat him to his bed,  
And slept until the night was late  
And few men stirred from gate to gate.

So when at midnight he did wake,  
Pickaxe and shovel did he take,

And, going to that now silent square,  
He found the mark his knife made there,  
And quietly with many a stroke  
The pavement of the place he broke :  
And so, the stones being set apart,  
He 'gan to dig with beating heart,  
And from the hole in haste he cast  
The marl and gravel ; till at last,  
Full shoulder high, his arms were jarred,  
For suddenly his spade struck hard  
With clang against some metal thing :  
And soon he found a brazen ring,  
All green with rust, twisted, and great  
As a man's wrist, set in a plate  
Of copper, wrought all curiously  
With words unknown though plain to see,  
Spite of the rust ; and flowering trees,  
And beasts, and wicked images,  
Whereat he shuddered : for he knew  
What ill things he might come to do,  
If he should still take part with these  
And that Great Master strive to please.

But small time had he then to stand  
And think, so straight he set his hand  
Unto the ring, but where he thought  
That by main strength it must be brought  
From out its place, lo ! easily  
It came away, and let him see  
A winding staircase wrought of stone,



Wherethrough the new-come wind did moan.

Then thought he, "If I come alive  
From out this place well shall I thrive,  
For I may look here certainly  
The treasures of a king to see,  
A mightier man than men are now.  
So in few days what man shall know  
The needy Scholar, seeing me  
Great in the place where great men be,  
The richest man in all the land?  
Beside the best then shall I stand,  
And some unheard-of palace have;  
And if my soul I may not save  
In heaven, yet here in all men's eyes  
Will I make some sweet paradise,  
With marble cloisters, and with trees  
And bubbling wells, and fantasies,  
And things all men deem strange and rare,  
And crowds of women kind and fair,  
That I may see, if so I please,  
Laid on the flowers, or mid the trees  
With half-clad bodies wandering.  
There, dwelling happier than the king,  
What lovely days may yet be mine!  
How shall I live with love and wine,  
And music, till I come to die!  
And then —— Who knoweth certainly  
What haps to us when we are dead?  
Truly I think by likelihead

Nought haps to us of good or bad ;  
Therefore on earth will I be glad  
A short space, free from hope or fear ;  
And fearless will I enter here  
And meet my fate, whatso it be."

Now on his back a bag had he,  
To bear what treasure he might win,  
And therewith now did he begin  
To go adown the winding stair ;  
And found the walls all painted fair  
With images of many a thing,  
Warrior and priest, and queen and king,  
But nothing knew what they might be.  
Which things full clearly could he see,  
For lamps were hung up here and there  
Of strange device, but wrought right fair,  
And pleasant savour came from them.

At last a curtain, on whose hem  
Unknown words in red gold were writ,  
He reached, and softly raising it  
Stepped back, for now did he behold  
A goodly hall hung round with gold,  
And at the upper end could see  
Sitting, a glorious company :  
Therefore he trembled, thinking well  
They were no men, but fiends of hell.  
But while he waited, trembling sore,  
And doubtful of his late-learned lore,

A cold blast of the outer air  
Blew out the lamps upon the stair  
And all was dark behind him ; then  
Did he fear less to face those men  
Than, turning round, to leave them there  
While he went groping up the stair.  
Yea, since he heard no cry or call  
Or any speech from them at all,  
He doubted they were images  
Set there some dying king to please  
By that Great Master of the art ;  
Therefore at last with stouter heart  
He raised the cloth and entered in  
In hope that happy life to win,  
And drawing nigher did behold  
That these were bodies dead and cold  
Attired in full royal guise,  
And wrought by art in such a wise  
That living they all seemed to be,  
Whose very eyes he well could see,  
That now beheld not foul or fair,  
Shining as though alive they were.  
And midmost of that company  
An ancient king that man could see,  
A mighty man, whose beard of grey  
A foot over his gold gown lay ;  
And next beside him sat his queen  
Who in a flowery gown of green  
And golden mantle well was clad,

And on her neck a collar had  
Too heavy for her dainty breast ;  
Her loins by such a belt were prest  
That whoso in his treasury  
Held that alone, a king might be.  
On either side of these, a lord  
Stood heedfully before the board,  
And in their hands held bread and wine  
For service ; behind these did shine  
The armour of the guards, and then  
The well-attiréd serving-men,  
The minstrels clad in raiment meet ;  
And over against the royal seat  
Was hung a lamp, although no flame  
Was burning there, but there was set  
Within its open golden fret  
A huge carbuncle, red and bright ;  
Wherefrom there shone forth such a light  
That great hall was as clear by it,  
As though by wax it had been lit,  
As some great church at Easter-tide.

Now set a little way aside,  
Six paces from the daïs stood  
An image made of brass and wood,  
In likeness of a full-armed knight  
Who pointed 'gainst the ruddy light  
A huge shaft ready in a bow.

Pondering how he could come to know  
What all these marvellous matters meant,

About the hall the Scholar went,  
Trembling, though nothing moved as yet ;  
And for awhile did he forget  
The longings that had brought him there  
In wondering at these marvels fair ;  
And still for fear he doubted much  
One jewel of their robes to touch.

But as about the hall he passed  
He grew more used to them at last,  
And thought, " Swiftly the time goes by,  
And now no doubt the day draws nigh  
Folk will be stirring : by my head  
A fool I am to fear the dead,  
Who have seen living things enow,  
Whose very names no man can know,  
Whose shapes brave men might well affright  
More than the lion in the night  
Wandering for food ;" therewith he drew  
Unto those royal corpses two,  
That on dead brows still wore the crown ;  
And midst the golden cups set down  
The rugged wallet from his back,  
Patched of strong leather, brown and black.  
Then, opening wide its mouth, took up  
From off the board, a golden cup  
The King's dead hand was laid upon,  
Whose unmoved eyes upon him shone  
And recked no more of that last shame

Than if he were the beggar lame,  
Who in old days was wont to wait  
For a dog's meal beside the gate.

Of which shame nought our man did reck.  
But laid his hand upon the neck  
Of the slim Queen, and thence undid  
The jewelled collar, that straight slid  
Down her smooth bosom to the board.  
And when these matters he had stored  
Safe in his sack, with both their crowns,  
The jewelled parts of their rich gowns,  
Their shoes and belts, brooches and rings,  
And cleared the board of all rich things,  
He staggered with them down the hall.  
But as he went his eyes did fall  
Upon a wonderful green stone,  
Upon the hall-floor laid alone ;  
He said, " Though thou art not so great  
To add by much unto the weight  
Of this my sack indeed, yet thou,  
Certes, would make me rich enow,  
That verily with thee I might  
Wage one-half of the world to fight  
The other half of it, and I  
The lord of all the world might die ;--  
I will not leave thee ;" therewithal  
He knelt down midmost of the hall,  
Thinking it would come easily  
Into his hand ; but when that he

Gat hold of it, full fast it stack,  
So fuming, down he laid his sack,  
And with both hands pulled lustily,  
But as he strained, he cast his eye  
Back to the dais ; there he saw  
The bowman image 'gin to draw  
The mighty bowstring to his ear,  
So, shrieking out aloud for fear,  
Of that rich stone he loosed his hold  
And catching up his bag of gold,  
Gat to his feet : but ere he stood  
The evil thing of brass and wood  
Up to his ear the notches drew ;  
And clanging, forth the arrow flew,  
And midmost of the carbuncle  
Clanging again, the forked barbs fell,  
And all was dark as pitch straightway.

So there until the judgment day  
Shall come and find his bones laid low  
And raise them up for weal or woe,  
This man must bide ; cast down he lay  
While all his past life day by day  
In one short moment he could see  
Drawn out before him, while that he  
In terror by that fatal stone  
Was laid, and scarcely dared to moan.  
But in a while his hope returned,  
And then, though nothing he discerned,

He gat him up upon his feet,  
And all about the walls he beat  
To find some token of the door,  
But never could he find it more,  
For by some dreadful sorcery  
All was sealed close as it might be  
And midst the marvels of that hall  
This scholar found the end of all.

But in the town on that same night.  
An hour before the dawn of light,  
Such storm upon the place there fell,  
That not the oldest man could tell  
Of such another : and thereby  
The image was burnt utterly,  
Being stricken from the clouds above ;  
And folk deemed that same bolt did move  
The pavement where that wretched one  
Unto his foredoomed fate had gone,  
Because the plate was set again  
Into its place, and the great rain  
Washed the earth down, and sorcery  
Had hid the place where it did lie.

So soon the stones were set all straight,  
But yet the folk, afraid of fate,  
Where once the man of cornel wood  
Through many a year of bad and good  
Had kept his place, set up alone  
Great Jove himself, cut in white stone,



But thickly overlaid with gold.  
"Which," saith my tale, "you may behold  
Unto this day, although indeed  
Some Lord or other, being in need,  
Took every ounce of gold away."

But now, this tale in some past day  
Being writ, I warrant all is gone,  
Both gold and weather-beaten stone.

Be merry, masters, while ye may,  
For men much quicker pass away.

THEY praised the tale, and for awhile they talked  
Of other tales of treasure-seekers balked,  
And shame and loss for men insatiate stored,  
Nitocris' tomb, the Niblungs' fatal hoard,  
The serpent-guarded treasures of the dead ;  
Then of how men would be remembered  
When they are gone ; and more than one could tell  
Of what unhappy things therefrom befell ;  
Or how by folly men have gained a name ;  
A name indeed, not hallowed by the fame  
Of any deeds remembered : and some thought,—  
“ Strange hopes and fears for what shall be but nought  
To dead men ! better it would be to give  
What things they may, while on the earth they live  
Unto the earth, and from the bounteous earth  
To take their pay of sorrow or of mirth,  
Hatred or love, and get them on their way ;  
And let the teeming earth fresh troubles make  
For other men, and ever for their sake  
Use what they left, when they are gone from it.”

But while amid such musings they did sit,  
Dark night being come, men lighted up the hall,  
And the chief man for minstrelsy did call,  
And other talk their dull thoughts chased away,  
Nor did they part till night was mixed with day.

## JUNE

O JUNE, O June, that we desired so,  
Wilt thou not make us happy on this day?  
Across the river thy soft breezes blow  
Sweet with the scent of beanfields far away,  
Above our heads rustle the aspens grey,  
Calm is the sky with harmless clouds beset,  
No thought of storm the morning vexes yet.

See, we have left our hopes and fears behind  
To give our very hearts up unto thee ;  
What better place than this then could we find  
By this sweet stream that knows not of the sea,  
That guesses not the city's misery,  
This little stream whose hamlets scarce have names,  
This far-off, lonely mother of the Thames ?

Here then, O June, thy kindness will we take ;  
And if indeed but pensive men we seem,  
What should we do ? thou wouldst not have us wake  
From out the arms of this rare happy dream  
And wish to leave the murmur of the stream,  
The rustling boughs, the twitter of the birds,  
And all thy thousand peaceful happy words.

NOW in the early June they deemed it good  
That they should go unto a house that stood  
On their chief river, so upon a day  
With favouring wind and tide they took their way  
Up the fair stream ; most lovely was the time  
Even amidst the days of that fair clime,  
And still the wanderers thought about their lives,  
And that desire that rippling water gives  
To youthful hearts to wander anywhere.

So midst sweet sights and sounds a house most fair  
They came to, set upon the river side  
Where kindly folk their coming did abide ;  
There they took land, and in the lime-trees' shade  
Beneath the trees they found the fair feast land,  
And sat, well pleased ; but when the water-hen  
Had got at last to think them harmless men,  
And they with rest, and pleasure, and old wine,  
Began to feel immortal and divine,  
An elder spoke, " O gentle friends, the day  
Amid such calm delight now slips away,  
And ye yourselves are grown so bright and glad  
I care not if I tell you something sad ;  
Sad, though the life I tell you of passed by,  
Unstained by sordid strife or misery ;  
Sad, because though a glorious end it tells,  
Yet on the end of glorious life it dwells,  
And striving through all things to reach the best  
Upon no midway happiness will rest."

## THE LOVE OF ALCESTIS.

## ARGUMENT

ADMETUS, King of Phœæ in Thessaly, received unwittingly Apollo as his servant, by the help of whom he won to wife Alcestis, daughter of Pelias : afterwards too, as in other things, so principally in this, Apollo gave him help, that when he came to die, he obtained of the Fates for him, that if another would die willingly in his stead, then he should live still ; and when to every one else this seemed impossible, Alcestis gave her life for her husband's.

MIDST sunny grass-clad meads that slope adown  
To lake Boebeis stands an ancient town,  
Where dwelt of old a lord of Thessaly,  
The son of Pheres and fair Clymene,  
Who had to name Admetus : long ago  
The dwellers by the lake have ceased to know  
His name, because the world grows old, but then  
He was accounted great among great men ;  
Young, strong, and godlike, lacking nought at all  
Of gifts that unto royal men might fall  
In those old simple days, before men went  
To gather unseen harm and discontent,

Along with all the alien merchandise  
That rich folk need, too restless to be wise.

Now on the fairest of all autumn eves,  
When midst the dusty, crumpled, dying leaves  
The black grapes showed, and every press and vat  
Was newly scoured, this King Admetus sat  
Among his people, wearied in such wise  
By hopeful toil as makes a paradise  
Of the rich earth ; for light and far away  
Seemed all the labour of the coming day,  
And no man wished for more than then he had,  
Nor with another's mourning was made glad.  
There in the pillared porch, their supper done,  
They watched the fair departing of the sun ;  
The while the soft-eyed well-girt maidens poured  
The joy of life from out the jars long stored  
Deep in the earth, while little like a king,  
As we call kings, but glad with everything,  
The wise Thessalian sat and blessed his life,  
So free from sickening fear and foolish strife.

But midst the joy of this festivity,  
Turning aside he saw a man draw nigh,  
Along the dusty grey vine-bordered road  
That had its ending at his fair abode ;  
He seemed e'en from afar to set his face  
Unto the King's adorned reverend place,  
And like a traveller went he wearily,  
And yet as one who seems his rest to see.

A staff he bore, but nowise was he bent  
With scrip or wallet ; so withal he went  
Straight to the King's high seat, and standing near,  
Seemed a stout youth and noble, free from fear,  
But peaceful and unarmed ; and though ill clad,  
And though the dust of that hot land he had  
Upon his limbs and face, as fair was he  
As any king's son you might lightly see,  
Grey-eyed and crisp-haired, beautiful of limb,  
And no ill eye the women cast on him.

But kneeling now, and stretching forth his hand,  
He said, "O thou, the king of this fair land,  
Unto a banished man some shelter give,  
And help me with thy goods that I may live :  
Thou hast good store, Admetus, yet may I,  
Who kneel before thee now in misery,  
Give thee more gifts before the end shall come  
Than all thou hast laid safely in thine home."

"Rise up, and be my guest," Admetus said,  
"I need no gifts for this poor gift of bread,  
The land is wide, and bountiful enow.  
What thou canst do, to-morrow thou shalt show,  
And be my man, perchance ; but this night rest  
Not questioned more than any passing guest.  
Yea, even if a great king thou hast spilt,  
Thou shall not answer aught but as thou wilt."

Then the man rose and said, "O King, indeed  
Of thine awarded silence have I need,  
Nameless I am, nameless what I have done

Must be through many circles of the sun.  
But for to-morrow—let me rather tell  
On this same eve what things I can do well,  
And let me put mine hand in thine and swear  
To serve thee faithfully a changing year ;  
Nor think the woods of Ossa hold one beast  
That of thy tenderest yearling shall make feast,  
Whiles that I guard thy flocks, and thou shalt bear  
Thy troubles easier when thou com'st to hear  
The music I can make. Let these thy men  
Witness against me if I fail thee, when  
War falls upon thy lovely land and thee."

Then the King smiled, and said, "So let it be,  
Well shalt thou serve me, doing far less than this,  
Nor for thy service due gifts shalt thou miss :  
Behold I take thy faith with thy right hand,  
Be thou true man unto this guarded land.  
Ho ye ! take this my guest, find raiment meet  
Wherewith to clothe him ; bathe his wearied feet,  
And bring him back beside my throne to feast."

But to himself he said, "I am the least  
Of all Thessalians if this man was born  
In any earthly dwelling more forlorn  
Than a king's palace."

Then a damsel slim  
Led him inside, nought loth to go with him,  
And when the cloud of steam had curled to meet  
Within the brass his wearied dusty feet,  
She from a carved press brought him linen fair,



And a new-woven coat a king might wear,  
And so being clad he came unto the feast,  
But as he came again, all people ceased  
What talk they held soever, for they thought  
A very god among them had been brought ;  
And doubly glad the king Admetus was  
At what that dying eve had brought to pass,  
And bade him sit by him and feast his fill.

So there they sat till all the world was still,  
And 'twixt the pillars their red torches' shine  
Held forth unto the night a joyous sign.

SO henceforth did this man at Pheræ dwell,  
And what he set his hand to wrought right well,  
And won much praise and love in everything,  
And came to rule all herdsmen of the King ;  
But for two things in chief his fame did grow ;  
And first that he was better with the bow  
Than any 'twixt Olympus and the sea,  
And then that sweet, heart-piercing melody  
He drew out from the rigid-seeming lyre,  
And made the circle round the winter fire  
More like to heaven than gardens of the May.  
So many a heavy thought he chased away  
From the King's heart, and softened many a hate,  
And choked the spring of many a harsh debate ;

And, taught by wounds, the snatchers of the wolds  
Lurked round the gates of less well-guarded folds.  
Therefore Admetus loved him, yet withal,  
Strange doubts and fears upon his heart did fall ;  
For morns there were when he the man would meet,  
His hair wreathed round with bay and blossoms sweet,  
Gazing distraught into the brightening east,  
Nor taking heed of either man or beast,  
Or anything that was upon the earth.  
Or sometimes, midst the hottest of the mirth,  
Within the King's hall, would he seem to wake  
As from a dream, and his stringed tortoise take  
And strike the cords unbidden, till the hall  
Filled with the glorious sound from wall to wall,  
Trembled and seemed as it would melt away,  
And sunken down the faces weeping lay  
That erewhile laughed the loudest ; only he  
Stood upright, looking forward steadily  
With sparkling eyes as one who cannot weep,  
Until the storm of music sank to sleep.

But this thing seemed the doubtfullest of all  
Unto the King, that should there chance to fall  
A festal day, and folk did sacrifice  
Unto the gods, ever by some device  
The man would be away : yet with all this  
His presence doubled all Admetus' bliss,  
And happy in all things he seemed to live,  
And great gifts to his herdsman did he give.

But now the year came round again to spring,  
And southward to Iolchos went the King ;  
For there did Pelias hold a sacrifice  
Unto the gods, and put forth things of price  
For men to strive for in the people's sight ;  
So on a morn of April, fresh and bright,  
Admetus shook the golden-studded reins,  
And soon from windings of the sweet-banked lanes  
The south wind blew the sound of hoof and wheel,  
Clatter of brazen shields and clink of steel  
Unto the herdsman's ears, who stood awhile  
Harkening the echoes with a godlike smile,  
Then slowly gat him foldwards, murmuring,  
" Fair music for the wooing of a King."

But in six days again Admetus came,  
With no lost labour or dishonoured name ;  
A scarlet cloak upon his back he bare  
A gold crown on his head, a falchion fair  
Girt to his side ; behind him four white steeds,  
Whose dams had fed full in Nisæan meads ;  
All prizes that his valiant hands had won  
Within the guarded lists of Tyro's son.  
Yet midst the sound of joyous minstrelsy  
No joyous man in truth he seemed to be ;  
So that folk looking on him said, " Behold,  
The wise King will not show himself too bold  
Amidst his greatness : the gods too are great,  
And who can tell the dreadful ways of fate?"

Howe'er it was, he gat him through the town,

And midst their shouts at last he lighted down  
At his own house, and held high feast that night ;  
And yet by seeming had but small delight  
In aught that any man could do or say :  
And on the morrow, just at dawn of day,  
Rose up and clad himself, and took his spear,  
And in the fresh and blossom-scented air  
Went wandering till he reach Boëbeis' shore ;  
Yet by his troubled face set little store  
By all the songs of birds and scent of flowers ;  
Yea, rather unto him the fragrant hours  
Were grown but dull and empty of delight.

So going, at the last he came in sight  
Of his new herdsman, who that morning lay  
Close by the white sand of a little bay  
The teeming ripple of Boëbeis lapped ;  
There he in cloak of white-wooled sheepskin wrapped  
Against the cold dew, free from trouble sang,  
The while the heifers' bells about him rang  
And mingled with the sweet soft-throated birds  
And bright fresh ripple : listen, then, these words  
Will tell the tale of his felicity,  
Halting and void of music though they be.

## SONG.

**O** DWELLERS on the lovely earth,  
Why will ye break your rest and mirth  
To weary us with fruitless prayer ;  
Why will ye toil and take such care

For children's children yet unborn,  
And garner store of strife and scorn  
To gain a scarce-remembered name,  
Cumbered with lies and soiled with shame?  
And if the gods care not for you,  
What is this folly ye must do  
To win some mortal's feeble heart?  
O fools! when each man plays his part,  
And heeds his fellow little more  
Than these blue waves that kiss the shore  
Take heed of how the daisies grow.  
O fools! and if ye could but know  
How fair a world to you is given.

O brooder on the hills of heaven,  
When for my sin thou drav'st me forth,  
Hadst thou forgot what this was worth,  
Thine own hand had made? The tears of men,  
The death of threescore years and ten,  
The trembling of the timorous race—  
Had these things so bedimmed the place  
Thine own hand made, thou couldst not know  
To what a heaven the earth might grow  
If fear beneath the earth were laid,  
If hope failed not, nor love decayed.

He stopped, for he beheld his wandering lord,  
Who, drawing near, heard little of his word,  
And noted less; for in that haggard mood

Nought could he do but o'er his sorrows brood,  
Whate'er they were, but now being come anigh,  
He lifted up his drawn face suddenly,  
And as the singer gat him to his feet,  
His eyes Admetus' troubled eyes did meet,  
As with some speech he now seemed labouring,  
Which from his heart his lips refused to bring.  
Then spoke the herdsman, "Master, what is this,  
That thou, returned with honour to the bliss,  
The gods have given thee here, still makest show  
To be some wretch bent with the weight of woe?  
What wilt thou have? What help there is in me  
Is wholly thine, for in felicity  
Within thine house thou still hast let me live,  
Nor grudged most noble gifts to me to give."

"Yea," said Admetus, "thou canst help indeed,  
But as the spring shower helps the unsown mead.  
Yet listen : at Iolchos the first day  
Unto Diana's house I took my way,  
Where all men gathered ere the games began,  
There, at the right side of the royal man,  
Who rules Iolchos, did his daughter stand,  
Who with a suppliant bough in her right hand  
Headed the band of maidens ; but to me  
More than a goddess did she seem to be,  
Nor fit to die ; and therewithal I thought  
That we had all been thither called for nought  
But that her bridegroom Pelias might choose,

And with that thought desire did I let loose,  
And striving not with Love, I gazed my fill,  
As one who will not fear the coming ill :  
Ah, foolish were mine eyes, foolish my heart,  
To strive in such a marvel to have part !  
What god shall wed her rather ? no more fear  
Than vexes Pallas vexed her forehead clear,  
Faith shone from out her eyes, and on her lips  
Unknown love trembled ; the Phoenician ships  
Within their dark holds nought so precious bring  
As her soft golden hair, no daintiest thing  
I ever saw was half so wisely wrought  
As was her rosy ear ; beyond all thought,  
All words to tell of, her veiled body showed,  
As, by the image of the Three-formed bowed,  
She laid her offering down ; then I drawn near  
The murmuring of her gentle voice could hear,  
As waking one hears music in the morn,  
Ere yet the fair June sun is fully born ;  
And sweeter than the roses fresh with dew  
Sweet odours floated round me, as she drew  
Some golden thing from out her balmy breast  
With her right hand, the while her left hand pressed  
The hidden wonders of her girdlestead ;  
And when abashed I sank adown my head,  
Dreading the god of Love, my eyes must meet  
The happy bands about her perfect feet.

“What more? thou know'st perchance what thing  
love is?

Kindness, and hot desire, and rage, and bliss,  
None first a moment ; but before that day  
No love I knew but what might pass away  
When hot desire was changed to certainty,  
Or not abide much longer ; e'en such stings  
Had smitten me, as the first warm day brings  
When March is dying ; but now half a god  
The crowded way unto the lists I trod,  
Yet hopeless as a vanquished god at whiles,  
And hideous seemed the laughter and the smiles,  
And idle talk about me on the way.

“ But none could stand before me on that day,  
I was as god-possessed, not knowing how  
The King had brought her forth but for a show,  
To make his glory greater through the land :  
Therefore at last victorious did I stand  
Among my peers, nor yet one well-known name  
Had gathered any honour from my shame.  
For there indeed both men of Thessaly,  
Ætolians, Thebans, dwellers by the sea,  
And folk of Attica and Argolis,  
Arcadian woodmen, islanders, whose bliss  
Is to be tossed about from wave to wave,  
All these at last to me the honour gave,  
Nor did they grudge it : yea, and one man said,  
A wise Thessalian with a snowy head,  
And voice grown thin with age, ‘ O Pelias,  
Surely to thee no evil thing it was  
That to thy house this rich Thessalian



Should come, to prove himself a valiant man  
Amongst these heroes ; for if I be wise  
By dint of many years, with wistful eyes  
Doth he behold thy daughter, this fair maid ;  
And surely, if the matter were well weighed,  
Good were it both for thee and for the land  
That he should take the damsel by the hand  
And lead her hence, for ye near neighbours dwell ;  
What sayest thou, King, have I said ill or well ?

“ With that must I, a fool, stand forth and ask  
If yet there lay before me some great task  
That I must do ere I the maid should wed,  
But Pelias, looking on us, smiled and said,  
‘ O neighbour of Larissa, and thou too,  
O King Admetus, this may seem to you  
A little matter ; yea, and for my part  
E’en such a marriage would make glad my heart ;  
But we the blood of Salmoneus who share  
With godlike gifts great burdens also bear,  
Nor is this maid without them, for the day  
On which her maiden zone she puts away  
Shall be her death-day, if she wed with one  
By whom this marvellous thing may not be done,  
For in the traces neither must steeds paw  
Before my threshold, or white oxen draw  
The wain that comes my maid to take from me,  
Far other beasts that day her slaves must be :  
The yellow lion ’neath the lash must roar,  
And by his side unscares, the forest boar

Toil at the draught : what sayest thou then hereto,  
O lord of Pheræ, wilt thou come to woo  
In such a chariot, and win endless fame,  
Or turn thine eyes elsewhere with little shame ?'

"What answered I? O herdsman, I was mad  
With sweet love and the triumph I had had.  
I took my father's ring from off my hand,  
And said, 'O heroes of the Grecian land,  
Be witnesses that on my father's name  
For this man's promise, do I take the shame  
Of this deed undone, if I fail herein :  
Fear not, O Pelias, but that I shall win  
This ring from thee, when I shall come again  
Through fair Iolchos, driving that strange wain.  
Else by this token, thou, O King, shalt have  
Pheræ my home, while on the tumbling wave  
A hollow ship my sad abode shall be.'

"So driven by some hostile deity,  
Such words I said, and with my gifts hard won,  
But little valued now, set out upon  
My homeward way : but nearer as I drew  
To mine abode, and ever fainter grew  
In my weak heart the image of my love,  
In vain with fear my boastful folly strove ;  
For I remembered that no god I was  
Though I had chanced my fellows to surpass ;  
And I began to mind me in a while  
What murmur rose, with what a mocking smile  
Pelias stretched out his hand to take the ring,

Made by my drunkard's gift now twice a king :  
And when unto my palace-door I came  
I had awakened fully to my shame ;  
For certainly no help is left to me,  
But I must get me down unto the sea  
And build a keel, and whatso things I may  
Set in her hold, and cross the watery way  
Whither Jove bids, and the rough winds may blow  
Unto a land where none my folly know,  
And there begin a weary life anew."

Eager and bright the herdsman's visage grew  
The while this tale was told, and at the end  
He said, " Admetus, I thy life may mend,  
And thou at lovely Pheræ still may dwell ;  
Wait for ten days, and then may all be well,  
And thou to fetch thy maiden home may go,  
And to the King thy team unheard-of show.  
And if not, then make ready for the sea  
Nor will I fail indeed to go with thee,  
And 'twixt the halyards and the ashen oar  
Finish the service well begun ashore ;  
But meanwhile do I bid thee hope the best ;  
And take another herdsman for the rest,  
For unto Ossa must I go alone  
To do a deed not easy to be done."

Then springing up he took his spear and bow  
And northward by the lake-shore 'gan to go ;

But the King gazed upon him as he went,  
Then, sighing, turned about, and homeward bent  
His lingering steps, and hope began to spring  
Within his heart, for some betokening  
He seemed about the herdsman now to see  
Of one from mortal cares and troubles free.

And so midst hopes and fears day followed day,  
Until at last upon his bed he lay  
When the grey, creeping dawn had now begun  
To make the wide world ready for the sun  
On the tenth day : sleepless had been the night  
And now in that first hour of gathering light  
For weariness he slept, and dreamed that he  
Stood by the border of a fair, calm sea  
At point to go a-shipboard, and to leave  
Whatever from his sire he did receive  
Of land or kingship ; and withal he dreamed  
That through the cordage a bright light there gleamed  
Far off within the east ; and nowise sad  
He felt at leaving all he might have had,  
But rather as a man who goes to see  
Some heritage expected patiently.  
But when he moved to leave the firm fixed shore,  
The windless sea rose high and 'gan to roar,  
And from the gangway thrust the ship aside,  
Until he hung over a chasm wide  
Vocal with furious waves, yet had no fear  
For all the varied tumult he might hear,  
But slowly woke up to the morning light

That to his eyes seemed past all memory bright,  
And then strange sounds he heard, whereat his heart  
Woke up to joyous life with one glad start,  
And nigh his bed he saw the herdsman stand,  
Holding a long white staff in his right hand,  
Carved with strange figures ; and withal he said,

“Awake, Admetus ! loiter not a-bed,  
But haste thee to bring home thy promised bride,  
For now an ivory chariot waits outside,  
Yoked to such beasts as Pelias bade thee bring ;  
Whose guidance thou shalt find an easy thing,  
If in thine hands thou holdest still this rod,  
Whereon are carved the names of every god  
That rules the fertile earth ; but having come  
Unto King Pelias’ well-adornéd home,  
Abide not long, but take the royal maid,  
And let her dowry in thy wain be laid,  
Of silver and fine cloth and unmixed gold,  
For this indeed will Pelias not withhold  
When he shall see thee like a very god.  
Then let thy beasts, ruled by this carven rod,  
Turn round to Pheræ ; yet must thou abide  
Before thou comest to the streamlet’s side  
That feed its dykes ; there, by the little wood  
Wherein unto Diana men shed blood,  
Will I await thee, and thou shalt descend  
And hand-in-hand afoot through Pheræ wend ;  
And yet I bid thee, this night let thy bride  
Apart among the womenfolk abide ;

That on the morrow thou with sacrifice  
For these strange deeds may pay a fitting price."

But as he spoke with something like to awe,  
His eyes and much-changed face Admetus saw,  
And voiceless like a slave his words obeyed ;  
For rising up no more delay he made,  
But took the staff and gained the palace-door [roar  
Where stood the beasts, whose mingled whine and  
Had wrought his dream ; there two and two they stood,  
Thinking, it might be, of the tangled wood,  
And all the joys of the food-hiding trees,  
But harmless as their painted images  
'Neath some dread spell ; then, leaping up, he took  
The reins in hand and the bossed leather shook,  
And no delay the conquered beasts durst make  
But drew, not silent ; and folk just awake  
When he went by, as though a god they saw,  
Fell on their knees, and maidens come to draw  
Fresh water from the fount sank trembling down,  
And silence held the babbling wakened town.

So 'twixt the dewy hedges did he wend,  
And still their noise afar the beasts did send,  
His strange victorious advent to proclaim,  
Till to Iolchos at the last he came,  
And drew anigh the gates, whence in affright  
The guards fled, helpless at the wondrous sight ;  
And through the town news of the coming spread  
Of some great god so that the scared priests led

Pale suppliants forth ; who, in unmeet attire  
And hastily-caught boughs and smouldering fire  
Within their censers, in the market-place  
Awaited him with many an upturned face,  
Trembling with fear of that unnamed new god ;  
But through the midst of them his lions trod  
With noiseless feet, nor noted aught their prey,  
And the boars' hooves went pattering on the way,  
While from their churning tusks the white foam flew  
As raging, helpless, in the trace they drew.

But Pelias, knowing all the work of fate,  
Sat in his brazen-pillared porch to wait  
The coming of the King ; the while the maid  
In her fair marriage garments was arrayed,  
And from strong places of his treasury  
Men brought fine scarlet from the Syrian sea,  
And works of brass, and ivory, and gold ;  
But when the strange yoked beasts he did behold  
Come through the press of people terrified,  
Then he arose and o'er the clamour cried,  
"Hail, thou, who like a very god art come  
To bring great honour to my damsel's home ;"  
And when Admetus tightened rein before  
The gleaming, brazen-wrought, half-opened door,  
He cried to Pelias, "Hail, to thee, O King ;  
Let me behold once more my father's ring,  
Let me behold the prize that I have won,  
Mine eyes are wearying now to look upon."

"Fear not," he said, "the Fates are satisfied ;

Yet wilt thou not descend and here abide,  
Doing me honour till the next bright morn  
Has dried the dew upon the new-sprung corn,  
That we in turn may give the honour due  
To such a man that such a thing can do,  
And unto all the gods may sacrifice?"

"Nay," said Admetus, "if thou call'st me wise,  
And like a very god thou dost me deem,  
Shall I abide the ending of the dream  
And so gain nothing? nay, let me be glad  
That I at least one godlike hour have had  
At whatsoever time I come to die,  
That I may mock the world that passes by,  
And yet forgets it." Saying this, indeed,  
Of Pelias did he seem to take small heed,  
But spoke as one unto himself may speak,  
And still the half-shut door his eyes did seek,  
Wherethrough from distant rooms sweet music came,  
Setting his over-strained heart a-flame,  
Because amidst the Lydian flutes he thought  
From place to place his love the maidens brought.

Then Pelias said, "What can I give to thee  
Who fail'st so little of divinity?  
Yet let my slaves lay these poor gifts within  
Thy chariot, while my daughter strives to win  
The favour of the spirits of this place,  
Since from their altars she must turn her face  
For ever now; hearken, her flutes I hear,  
From the last chapel doth she draw anear."



Then by Admetus' feet the folk 'gan pile  
The precious things, but he no less the while  
Stared at the door ajar, and thought it long  
Ere with the flutes mingled the maidens' song,  
And both grew louder, and the scarce-seen floor  
Was fluttering with white raiment, and the door  
By slender fingers was set open wide,  
And midst her damsels he beheld the bride  
Ungirt, with hair unbound and garlanded :  
Then Pelias took her slender hand and said,  
" Daughter, this is the man that takes from thee  
Thy curse midst women, think no more to be  
Childless, unloved, and knowing little bliss ;  
But now behold how like a god he is,  
And yet with what prayers for the love of thee  
He must have wearied some divinity,  
And therefore in thine inmost heart be glad  
That thou 'mongst women such a man hast had." [saw

Then she with wondering eyes that strange team  
A moment, then as one with gathering awe  
Might turn from Jove's bird unto very Jove,  
So did she raise her grey eyes to her love,  
But to her brow the blood rose therewithal,  
And she must tremble, such a look did fall  
Upon her faithful eyes, that none the less  
Would falter aught, for all her shamefastness,  
But rather to her lover's hungry eyes  
Gave back a tender look of glad surprise,  
Wherein love's flame began to flicker now.

Withal, her father kissed her on the brow,  
And said, "O daughter, take this royal ring,  
And set it on the finger of the King,  
And come not back ; and thou, Admetus, pour  
This wine to Jove before my open door,  
And glad at heart take back thine own with thee."

Then with that word Alcestis silently,  
And with no look cast back, and ring in hand,  
Went forth, and soon beside her love did stand,  
Nor on his finger failed to set the ring ;  
And then a golden cup the city's King  
Gave to him, and he poured and said, "O thou,  
From whatsoever place thou lookest now,  
What prayers, what gifts unto thee shall I give  
That we a little time with love may live ?  
A little time of love, then fall asleep  
Together, while the crown of love we keep."

So spake he, and his strange beasts turned about,  
And heeded not the people's wavering shout  
That from their old fear and new pleasure sprung,  
Nor noted aught of what the damsels sung,  
Or of the flowers that after them they cast,  
But like a dream the guarded city passed,  
And 'twixt the song of birds and blossoms' scent  
It seemed for many hundred years they went,  
Though short the way was unto Pheræ's gates ;  
Time they forgot, and gods, and men, and fates,  
However nigh unto their hearts they were ;  
The woodland boars, the yellow lords of fear

No more seemed strange to them, but all the earth  
With all its changing sorrow and wild mirth  
In that fair hour seemed new-born to the twain,  
Grief seemed a play forgot, a pageant vain,  
A picture painted, who knows where or when,  
With soulless images of restless men ;  
For every thought but love was now gone by,  
And they forgot that they should ever die.

But when they came anigh the sacred wood,  
There, bidding them, Admetus' herdsman stood,  
At sight of whom those yoke-fellows unchecked  
Stopped dead and little of Admetus recked  
Who now, as one from dreams not yet awake,  
Drew back his love and did his wain forsake,  
And gave the carven rod and guiding bands  
Into the waiting herdsman's outstretched hands,  
But when he would have thanked him for the thing  
That he had done, his speechless tongue must cling  
Unto his mouth, and why he could not tell.  
But the man said, "No words! thou hast done well  
To me, as I to thee; the day may come  
When thou shalt ask me for a fitting home,  
Nor shalt thou ask in vain; but hasten now,  
And to thine house this royal maiden show,  
Then give her to thy women for this night.  
But when thou wakest up to thy delight  
To-morrow, do all things that should be done,  
Nor of the gods, forget thou any one,

And on the next day will I come again  
To tend thy flocks upon the grassy plain.

\* "But now depart, and from thine home send here  
Chariot and horse, these gifts of thine to bear  
Unto thine house, and going, look not back  
Lest many a wished-for thing thou com'st to lack."

Then hand in hand together, up the road  
The lovers passed unto the King's abode,  
And as they went, the whining snort and roar  
From the yoked beasts they heard break out once more  
And then die off, as they were led away,  
But whether to some place lit up by day,  
Or, 'neath the earth, they knew not, for the twain  
Went hastening on, nor once looked back again.

But soon the minstrels met them, and a band  
Of white-robed damsels flowery boughs in hand,  
To bid them welcome to that pleasant place.  
Then they, rejoicing much, in no long space  
Came to the brazen-pillared porch, whereon  
From 'twixt the passes of the hills yet shone  
The dying sun; and there she stood awhile  
Without the threshold, a faint tender smile  
Trembling upon her lips 'twixt love and shame,  
Until each side of her a maiden came  
And raised her in their arms, that her fair feet  
The polished brazen threshold might not meet,  
And in Admetus' house she stood at last.

But to the women's chamber straight she passed  
Bepraised of all,—and so the wakeful night

Lonely the lovers passed e'en as they might.

But the next day, with many a sacrifice,  
Admetus wrought, for such a well-won prize,  
A life so blest, the gods to satisfy,  
And many a matchless beast that day did die  
Upon the altars ; nought unlucky seemed  
To be amid the joyous crowd that gleamed  
With gold and precious things, and only this  
Seemed wanting to the King of Phæræ's bliss,  
That all these pageants should be soon past by,  
And hid by night the fair spring blossoms lie.

YET on the morrow-morn Admetus came,  
A haggard man oppressed with grief and shame  
Unto the spot beside Boëbeis' shore  
Whereby he met his herdsman once before,  
And there again he found him flushed and glad,  
And from the babbling water newly clad,  
Then he with downcast eyes these words began,  
"O thou, whatso thy name is, god or man,  
Hearken to me ; meseemeth of thy deed  
Some dread immortal taketh angry heed.

"Last night the height of my desire seemed won,  
All day my weary eyes had watched the sun

Rise up and sink, and now was come the night  
When I should be alone with my delight ;  
Silent the house was now from floor to roof,  
And in the well-hung chambers, far aloof,  
The feasters lay ; the moon was in the sky,  
The soft spring wind was wafting lovingly  
Across the gardens fresh scents to my sweet,  
As, troubled with the sound of my own feet,  
I passed betwixt the pillars, whose long shade  
Black on the white red-veined floor was laid :  
So happy was I that the briar-rose,  
Rustling outside within the flowery close,  
Seemed but Love's odorous wing—too real all seemed  
For such a joy as I had never dreamed.

“ Why do I linger, as I lingered not  
In that fair hour, now ne'er to be forgot  
While my life lasts?—Upon the gilded door  
I laid my hand ; I stood upon the floor  
Of the bride-chamber, and I saw the bride,  
Lovelier than any dream, stand by the side  
Of the gold bed, with hands that hid her face :  
One cry of joy I gave, and then the place  
Seemed changed to hell as in a hideous dream.

“ Still did the painted silver pillars gleam  
Betwixt the scented torches and the moon ;  
Still did the garden shed its odorous boon  
Upon the night ; still did the nightingale  
Unto his brooding mate tell all his tale :  
But, risen 'twixt my waiting love and me,

As soundless as the dread eternity,  
Sprung up from nothing, could mine eyes behold  
A huge dull-gleaming dreadful coil that rolled  
In changing circles on the pavement fair.  
Then for the sword that was no longer there  
My hand sank to my side ; around I gazed,  
And 'twixt the coils I met her grey eyes, glazed  
With sudden horror most unspeakable ;  
And when mine own upon no weapon fell,  
For what should weapons do in such a place,  
Unto the dragon's head I set my face,  
And raised bare hands against him, but a cry  
Burst on mine ears of utmost agony  
That nailed me there, and she cried out to me,  
' O get thee hence ; alas, I cannot flee !  
They coil about me now, my lips to kiss.  
O love, why hast thou brought me unto this ?'

“ Alas, my shame ! trembling, away I slunk,  
Yet turning saw the fearful coil had sunk  
To whence it came, my love's limbs freed I saw,  
And a long breath at first I heard her draw  
As one redeemed, then heard the hard sobs come,  
And wailings for her new accurséd home.  
But there outside across the door I lay,  
Like a scourged hound, until the dawn of day ;  
And as her gentle breathing then I heard  
As though she slept, before the earliest bird  
Began his song, I wandered forth to seek  
Thee, O strange man, e'en as thou seest me, weak

With all the torment of the night, and shamed  
With such a shame as never shall be named  
To aught but thee—Yea, yea, and why to thee  
Perchance this ends all thou wilt do for me?—  
What then, and have I not a cure for that?  
Lo, yonder is a rock where I have sat  
Full many an hour while yet my life was life,  
With hopes of all the coming wonder rife.  
No sword hangs by my side, no god will turn  
This cloudless hazy blue to black, and burn  
My useless body with his lightning flash;  
But the white waves above my bones may wash,  
And when old chronicles our house shall name  
They may leave out the letters and the shame,  
That make Admetus, once a king of men—  
And how could I be worse or better then?”

As one who notes a curious instrument  
Working against the maker's own intent,  
The herdsman eyed his wan face silently,  
And smiling for a while, and then said he,—  
“Admetus, thou, in spite of all I said,  
Hast drawn this evil thing upon thine head,  
Forgetting her who erewhile laid the curse  
Upon the maiden, so for fear of worse  
Go back again; for fair-limbed Artemis  
Now bars the sweet attainment of thy bliss;  
So taking heart, yet make no more delay  
But worship her upon this very day,



Nor spare for aught, and of thy trouble make  
No semblance unto any for her sake ;  
And thick upon the fair bride-chamber floor  
Strew dittany, and on each side the door  
Hang up such poppy-leaves as spring may yield ;  
And for the rest, myself may be a shield  
Against her wrath—nay, be thou not too bold  
To ask me that which may not now be told.  
Yea, even what thou deemest, hide it deep  
Within thine heart, and let thy wonder sleep,  
For surely thou shalt one day know my name,  
When the time comes again that autumn's flame  
Is dying off the vine-boughs, overturned,  
Stripped of their wealth. But now let gifts be burned  
To her I told thee of, and in three days  
Shall I by many hard and rugged ways  
Have come to thee again to bring thee peace.  
Go, the sun rises and the shades decrease."

Then, thoughtfully, Admetus gat him back,  
Nor did the altars of the Huntress lack  
The fattest of the flocks upon that day.  
But when night came, in arms Admetus lay  
Across the threshold of the bride-chamber,  
And nought amiss that night he noted there,  
But durst not enter, though about the door  
Young poppy-leaves were twined, and on the floor,  
Not flowered as yet with downy leaves and grey,  
Fresh dittany beloved of wild goats lay.

But when the whole three days and nights were done,

The herdsman came with rising of the sun,  
And said, "Admetus, now rejoice again,  
Thy prayers and offerings have not been in vain,  
And thou at last mayst come unto thy bliss ;  
And if thou askest for a sign of this,  
Take thou this token ; make good haste to rise,  
And get unto the garden-close that lies  
Below these windows sweet with greenery,  
And in the midst a marvel shalt thou see,  
Three white, black-hearted poppies blossoming,  
Though this is is but the middle of the spring."

Nor was it otherwise than he had said,  
And on that day with joy the twain were wed,  
And 'gan to lead a life of great delight ;  
But the strange woeful history of that night,  
The monstrous car, the promise to the King,  
All these through weary hours of chiselling  
Were wrought in stone, and in Diana's wall  
Set up, a joy and witness unto all.

But neither so would wingéd time abide,  
The changing year came round to autumn-tide,  
Until at last the day was fully come  
When the strange guest first reached Admetus' home.  
Then, when the sun was reddening to its end,  
He to Admetus' brazen porch did wend,  
Whom there he found feathering a poplar dart,  
Then said he, "King, the time has come to part.  
Come forth, for I have that to give thine ear  
No man upon the earth but thou must hear."

Then rose the King, and with a troubled look  
His well-steeled spear within his hand he took,  
And by his herdsman silently he went  
As to a peaked hill his steps he bent,  
Nor did the parting servant speak one word,  
As up they climbed, unto his silent lord,  
Till from the top he turned about his head  
From all the glory of the gold light, shed  
Upon the hill-top by the setting sun,  
For now indeed the day was well-nigh done,  
And all the eastern vale was grey and cold ;  
But when Admetus he did now behold,  
Panting beside him from the steep ascent,  
One much-changed godlike look on him he bent.  
And said, " O mortal, listen, for I see  
Thou deemest somewhat of what is in me ;  
Fear not ! I love thee, even as I can  
Who cannot feel the woes and ways of man  
In spite of this my seeming, for indeed  
Now thou beholdest Jove's immortal seed ,  
And what my name is I would tell thee now,  
If men who dwell upon the earth as thou  
Could hear the name and live ; but on the earth.  
With strange melodious stories of my birth,  
Phcebus men call me, and Latona's son.

" And now my servitude with thee is done,  
And I shall leave thee toiling on thine earth,  
This handful, that within its little girth  
Holds that which moves you so, O men that die ;

Behold, to-day thou hast felicity,  
But the times change, and I can see a day  
When all thine happiness shall fade away ;  
And yet be merry, strive not with the end,  
Thou canst not change it ; for the rest, a friend  
This year has won thee who shall never fail :  
But now indeed, for nought will it avail  
To say what I may have in store for thee,  
Of gifts that men desire ; let these things be,  
And live thy life, till death itself shall come,  
And turn to nought the storehouse of thine home,  
Then think of me ; these feathered shafts behold,  
That here have been the terror of the wold,  
Take these, and count them still the best of all  
Thine envied wealth, and when on thee shall fall  
By any way the worst extremity,  
Call upon me before thou com'st to die,  
And lay these shafts with incense on a fire,  
That thou mayst gain thine uttermost desire."

He ceased, but ere the golden tongue was still  
An odorous mist had stolen up the hill,  
And to Admetus first the god grew dim,  
And then was but a lovely voice to him,  
And then at last the sun had sunk to rest,  
And a fresh wind blew lightly from the west  
Over the hill-top, and no soul was there ;  
But the sad dying autumn field-flowers fair,  
Rustled dry leaves about the windy place,

Where even now had been the godlike face,  
And in their midst the brass-bound quiver lay.  
Then, going further westward, far away,  
He saw the gleaming of Peneus wan  
'Neath the white sky, but never any man,  
Except a grey-haired shepherd driving down  
From off the long slopes to his fold-yard brown  
His woolly sheep, with whom a maiden went,  
Singing for labour done and sweet content  
Of coming rest ; with that he turned again,  
And took the shafts up, never sped in vain,  
And came unto his house most deep in thought  
Of all the things the varied year had brought.

THENCEFORTH in bliss and honour day by day  
His measured span of sweet life wore away.  
A happy man he was ; no vain desire  
Of foolish fame had set his heart a-fire ;  
No care he had the ancient bounds to change,  
Nor yet for him must idle soldiers range  
From place to place about the burdened land,  
Or thick upon the ruined cornfields stand ;  
For him no trumpets blessed the bitter war,  
Wherein the right and wrong so mingled are,  
That hardly can the man of single heart  
Amid the sickening turmoil choose his part ;

For him sufficed the changes of the year,  
The god-sent terror was enough of fear  
For him; enough the battle with the earth,  
The autumn triumph over drought and dearth.

Better to him than wolf-moved battered shields,  
O'er poor dead corpses, seemed the stubble-fields  
Danced down beneath the moon, until the night  
Grew dreamy with a shadowy sweet delight,  
And with the high-risen moon came pensive thought.  
And men in love's despite must grow distraught  
And loiter in the dance, and maidens drop  
Their gathered raiment, and the fifer stop  
His dancing notes the pensive drone that chid,  
And as they wander to their dwellings, hid  
By the black shadowed trees, faint melody,  
Mournful and sweet, their soft good-night must be.

Far better spoil the gathering vat bore in  
Unto the pressing shed, than midst the din  
Of falling houses in war's waggon lies  
Besmeared with redder stains than Tyrian dyes;  
Or when the temple of the sea-born one  
With glittering crowns and gallant raiment shone,  
Fairer the maidens seemed by no chain bound,  
But such as amorous arms might cast around  
Their lovely bodies, than the wretched band  
Who midst the shipmen by the gangway stand;  
Each lonely in her speechless misery,  
And thinking of the worse time that shall be,  
When midst of folk who scarce can speak her name,

She bears the uttermost of toil and shame.

Better to him seemed that victorious crown,  
That midst the reverent silence of the town  
He oft would set upon some singer's brow  
Than was the conqueror's diadem, blest now  
By lying priests, soon, bent and bloody, hung  
Within the thorn by linnets well besung,  
Who think but little of the corpse beneath,  
Though ancient lands have trembled at his breath.

But to this King—fair Ceres' gifts, the days  
Whereon men sung in flushed Lyæus' praise  
Tales of old time, the bloodless sacrifice  
Unto the goddess of the downcast eyes  
And soft persuading lips, the ringing lyre  
Unto the bearer of the holy fire  
Who once had been amongst them—things like these  
Seemed meet to him men's yearning to appease,  
These were the triumphs of the peaceful king.

And so, betwixt seed-time and harvesting,  
With little fear his life must pass away;  
And for the rest, he, from the self-same day  
That the god left him, seemed to have some share  
In that same godhead he had harboured there:  
In all things grew his wisdom and his wealth,  
And folk beholding the fair state and health  
Wherein his land was, said, that now at last  
A fragment of the Golden Age was cast  
Over the place, for there was no debate,

And men forgot the very name of hate.

Nor failed the love of her he erst had won  
To hold his heart as still the years wore on,  
And she, no whit less fair than on the day  
When from Iolchos first she passed away,  
Did all his will as though he were a god,  
And loving still, the downward way she trod.

Honour and love, plenty and peace, he had ;  
Nor lacked for aught that makes a wise man glad,  
That makes him like a rich well-honoured guest  
Scarce sorry when the time comes, for the rest,  
That at the end perforce must bow his head.

And yet—was death not much remembered,  
As still with happy men the manner is ?  
Or, was he not so pleased with this world's bliss,  
As to be sorry when the time should come  
When but his name should hold his ancient home  
While he dwelt nowhere ? either way indeed,  
Will be enough for most men's daily need,  
And with calm faces they may watch the world,  
And note men's lives hither and thither hurled,  
As folk may watch the unfolding of a play—  
Nor this, nor that was King Admetus' way,  
For neither midst the sweetness of his life  
Did he forget the ending of the strife,  
Nor yet for heavy thoughts of passing pain  
Did all his life seem lost to him or vain,  
A wasteful jest of Jove, an empty dream ;  
Rather before him did a vague hope gleam,



That made him a great-hearted man and wise,  
Who saw the deeds of men with far-seeing eyes,  
And dealt them pitying justice still, as though  
The inmost heart of each man he did know ;  
This hope it was, and not his kingly place  
That made men's hearts rejoice to see his face  
Rise in the council hall ; through this, men felt  
That in their midst a son of man there dwelt  
Like and unlike them, and their friend through all ;  
And still as time went on, the more would fall  
This glory on the King's beloved head,  
And round his life fresh hope and fear were shed.

Yet at the last his good days passed away,  
And sick upon his bed Admetus lay,  
'Twixt him and death nought but a lessening veil  
Of hasty minutes, yet did hope not fail,  
Nor did bewildering fear torment him then,  
But still as ever, all the ways of men  
Seemed clear to him : but he, while yet his breath  
Still held the gateway 'gainst the arms of death,  
Turned to his wife, who, bowed beside the bed,  
Wept for his love, and dying goodlihead,  
And bade her put all folk from out the room,  
Then going to the treasury's rich gloom  
To bear the arrows forth, the Lycian's gift.  
So she, amidst her blinding tears, made shift  
To find laid in the inmost treasury  
Those shafts, and brought them unto him, but he,

Beholding them, beheld therewith his life,  
Both that now past, with many marvels rife,  
And that which he had hoped he yet should see.

Then spoke he faintly, "Love, 'twixt thee and me  
A film has come, and I am failing fast :  
And now our ancient happy life is past ;  
For either this is death's dividing hand,  
And all is done, or if the shadowy land  
I yet escape, full surely if I live  
The god with life some other gift will give,  
And change me unto thee : e'en at this tide  
Like a dead man among you all I bide,  
Until I once again behold my guest,  
And he has given me either life or rest :  
Alas, my love ! that thy too loving heart  
Nor with my life or death can have a part.  
O cruel words ! yet death is cruel too :  
Stoop down and kiss me, for I yearn for you  
E'en as the autumn yearneth for the sun."

"O love, a little time we have been one,  
And if we now are twain weep not therefore ;  
For many a man on earth desireth sore  
To have some mate upon the toilsome road,  
Some sharer of his still increasing load,  
And yet for all his longing and his pain  
His troubled heart must seek for love in vain,  
And till he dies still must he be alone—  
But now, although our love indeed is gone,  
Yet to this land as thou art leal and true

Set now thine hand to what I bid thee do,  
Because I may not die ; rake up the brands  
Upon the hearth, and from these trembling hands  
Cast incense thereon, and upon them lay  
These shafts, the relics of a happier day,  
Then watch with me ; perchance I may not die,  
Though the supremest hour now draws anigh  
Of life or death—O thou who madest me,  
The only thing on earth alike to thee,  
Why must I be unlike to thee in this ?  
Consider, if thou dost not do amiss  
To slay the only thing that feareth death  
Or knows its name, of all things drawing breath  
Upon the earth : see now for no short hour,  
For no half-halting death, to reach me slower  
Than other men, I pray thee—what avail  
To add some trickling grains unto the tale  
Soon told, of minutes thou dost snatch away  
From out the midst of that unending day  
Wherein thou dwellest ? rather grant me this  
To right me wherein thou hast done amiss,  
And give me life like thine for evermore.”

So murmured he, contending very sore  
Against the coming death ; but she meanwhile  
Faint with consuming love, made haste to pile  
The brands upon the hearth, and thereon cast  
Sweet incense, and the feathered shafts at last ;  
Then, trembling, back unto the bed she crept,

And lay down by his side, and no more wept,  
Nay scarce could think of death for very love  
That in her faithful heart for ever strove  
'Gainst fear and grief : but now the incense-cloud  
The old familiar chamber did enshroud,  
And on the very verge of death drawn close  
Wrapt both their weary souls in strange repose,  
That through sweet sleep sent kindly images  
Of simple things ; and in the midst of these,  
Whether it were but parcel of their dream,  
Or that they woke to it as some might deem,  
I know not, but the door was opened wide,  
And the King's name a voice long silent cried,  
And Phœbus on the very threshold trod,  
And yet in nothing liker to a god  
Than when he ruled Admetus' herds, for he  
Still wore the homespun coat men used to see  
Among the heifers in the summer morn,  
And round about him hung the herdsman's horn,  
And in his hand he bore the herdsman's spear  
And cornel bow, the prowling dog-wolf's fear,  
Though empty of its shafts the quiver was.

He to the middle of the room did pass,  
And said, "Admetus, neither all for nought  
My coming to thee is, nor have I brought  
Good tidings to thee ; poor man, thou shalt live  
If any soul for thee sweet life will give  
Enforced by none : for such a sacrifice  
Alone the fates can deem a fitting price

For thy redemption ; in no battle-field,  
Maddened by hope of glory life to yield,  
To give it up to heal no city's shame  
In hope of gaining long-enduring fame ;  
For whoso dieth for thee must believe  
That thou with shame that last gift wilt receive,  
And strive henceforward with forgetfulness  
The honied draught of thy new life to bless.  
Nay, and moreover such a glorious heart  
Who loves thee well enough with life to part  
But for thy love, with life must lose love too,  
Which e'en when wrapped about in weeds of woe  
Is godlike life indeed to such an one.

“ And now behold, three days ere life is done  
Do the Fates give thee, and I, even I,  
Upon thy life have shed felicity  
And given thee love of men, that they in turn  
With fervent love of thy dear love might burn.  
The people love thee and thy silk-clad breast,  
Thine open doors have given thee better rest  
Than woods of spears or hills of walls might do.  
And even now in wakefulness and woe  
The city lies, calling to mind thy love  
Wearying with ceaseless prayers the gods above.  
But thou—thine heart is wise enough to know  
That they no whit from their decrees will go.”

So saying, swiftly from the room he passed ;  
But on the world no look Admetus cast,

But peacefully turned round unto the wall  
As one who knows that quick death must befall :  
For in his heart he thought, " Indeed too well  
I know what men are, this strange tale to tell  
To those that live with me : yea, they will weep,  
And o'er my tomb most solemn days will keep,  
And in great chronicles will write my name,  
Telling to many an age my deeds and fame.  
For living men such things as this desire,  
And by such ways will they appease the fire  
Of love and grief : but when death comes to stare  
Full in men's faces, and the truth lays bare,  
How can we then have wish for anything,  
But unto life that gives us all to cling ?"

So said he, and with closed eyes did await,  
Sleeping or waking, the decrees of fate.

But now Alcestis rose, and by the bed  
She stood, with wild thoughts passing through her head.  
Dried were her tears, her troubled heart and sore  
Throbbled with the anguish of her love no more.  
A strange look on the dying man she cast,  
Then covered up her face and said, " O past !  
Past the sweet times that I remember well !  
Alas, that such a tale my heart can tell !  
Ah, how I trusted him ! what love was mine !  
How sweet to feel his arms about me twine,  
And my heart beat with his ! what wealth of bliss  
To hear his praises ! all to come to this,

That now I durst not look upon his face,  
Lest in my heart that other thing have place.  
That which I knew not, that which men call hate.

“ O me, the bitterness of God and fate !

A little time ago we two were one ;  
I had not lost him though his life was done,  
For still was he in me—but now alone  
Through the thick darkness must my soul make moan,  
For I must die : how can I live to bear  
An empty heart about, the nurse of fear ?  
How can I live to die some other tide,  
And, dying, hear my loveless name outcried  
About the portals of that weary land  
Whereby my shadowy feet should come to stand.

“ Alcestis ! O Alcestis, hadst thou known  
That thou one day shouldst thus be left alone,  
How hadst thou borne a living soul to love !  
Hadst thou not rather lifted hands to Jove,  
To turn thine heart to stone, thy front to brass,  
That through this wondrous world thy soul might pass,  
Well pleased and careless, as Diana goes  
Through the thick woods, all pitiless of those  
Her shafts smite down ? Alas ! how could it be  
Can a god give a god's delights to thee ?  
Nay rather, Jove, but give me once again,  
If for one moment only, that sweet pain  
The love I had while still I thought to live !  
Ah ! wilt thou not, since unto thee I give  
My life, my hope ?—But thou—I come to thee.

Thou sleepest : O wake not, nor speak to me  
In silence let my last hour pass away,  
And men forget my bitter feeble day."

With that she laid her down upon the bed,  
And nestling to him, kissed his weary head,  
And laid his wasted hand upon her breast,  
Yet woke him not ; and silence and deep rest  
Fell on that chamber. The night wore away  
Mid gusts of wailing wind, the twilight grey  
Stole o'er the sea, and wrought his wondrous change  
On things unseen by night, by day not strange,  
But now half seen and strange ; then came the sun,  
And therewithal the silent world and dun  
Waking, waxed many-coloured, full of sound,  
As men again their heap of troubles found,  
And woke up to their joy or misery.

But there, unmoved by aught, those twain did lie,  
Until Admetus' ancient nurse drew near  
Unto the open door, and full of fear  
Beheld them moving not, and as folk dead ;  
Then, trembling with her eagerness and dread,  
She cried, " Admetus ! art thou dead indeed ?  
Alcestis ! livest thou my words to heed ?  
Alas, alas, for this Thessalian folk !"

But with her piercing cry the King awoke,  
And round about him wildly 'gan to stare,  
As a bewildered man who knows not where  
He has awakened : but not thin or wan



His face was now, as of a dying man,  
But fresh and ruddy ; and his eyes shone clear,  
As of a man who much of life may bear.  
And at the first, but joy and great surprise  
Shone out from those awakened, new-healed eyes ;  
But as for something more at last he yearned,  
Unto his love with troubled brow he turned,  
For still she seemed to sleep : alas, alas !  
Her lonely shadow even now did pass  
Along the changeless fields, oft looking back,  
As though it yet had thought of some great lack.  
And here, the hand just fallen from off his breast  
Was cold ; and cold the bosom his hand pressed.  
And even as the colour lit the day  
The colour from her lips had waned away ;  
Yet still, as though that longed-for happiness  
Had come again her faithful heart to bless,  
Those white lips smiled, unwrinkled was her brow,  
But of her eyes no secrets might he know,  
For, hidden by the lids of ivory,  
Had they beheld that death a-drawing nigh.

Then o'er her dead corpse King Admetus hung,  
Such sorrow in his heart as his faint tongue  
Refused to utter ; yet the just-past night  
But dimly he remembered, and the sight  
Of the Far-darter, and the dreadful word  
That seemed to cleave all hope as with a sword :  
Yet stronger in his heart a knowledge grew,

That nought it was but her fond heart and true  
That all the marvel for his love had wrought,  
Whereby from death to life he had been brought ;  
That dead, his life she was, as she had been  
His life's delight while still she lived a queen.  
And he fell wondering if his life were gain,  
So wrapt as then in loneliness and pain ;  
Yet therewithal no tears would fill his eyes,  
For as a god he was.

Then did he rise

And gat him down unto the Council-place,  
And when the people saw his well-loved face  
Then cried aloud for joy to see him there.  
And earth again to them seemed blest and fair.  
And though indeed they did lament in turn,  
When of Alcestis' end they came to learn,  
Scarce was it more than seeming, or, at least,  
The silence in the middle of a feast,  
When men have memory of their heroes slain.  
So passed the order of the world again,  
Victorious Summer crowning lusty Spring,  
Rich Autumn faint with wealth of harvesting,  
And Winter the earth's sleep ; and then again  
Spring, Summer, Autumn, and the Winter's pain ;  
And still and still the same the years went by.

But Time, who slays so many a memory,  
Brought hers to light, the short-lived loving Queen ;  
And her fair soul, as scent of flowers unseen,

Sweetened the turmoil of long centuries.  
For soon, indeed, Death laid his hand on these,  
The shouters round the throne upon that day.  
And for Admetus, he, too, went his way,  
Though if he died at all I cannot tell ;  
But either on the earth he ceased to dwell,  
Or else, oft born again, had many a name.  
But through all lands of Greece Alcestis' fame  
Grew greater, and about her husband's twined  
Lived, in the hearts of far-off men enshrined.  
See I have told her tale, though I know not  
What men are dwelling now on that green spot  
Anigh Boëbeis, or if Pheræ still,  
With name oft changed perchance, adown the hill  
Still shows its white walls to the rising sun.  
—The gods at least remember what is done.

STRANGE felt the wanderers at his tale, for now  
Their old desires it seemed once more to show  
Unto their altered hearts, when now the rest,  
Most surely coming, of all things seemed best ;—  
— Unless, by death perchance they yet might gain  
Some space to try such deeds as now in vain  
They heard of amidst stories of the past ;  
Such deeds as they for that wild hope had cast  
From out their hands—they sighed to think of it,  
And how as deedless men they there must sit.

Yet, with the measured falling of that rhyme  
Mingled the lovely sights and glorious time,  
Whereby, in spite of hope long past away,  
In spite of knowledge growing day by day  
Of lives so wasted, in despite of death,  
With sweet content that eve they drew their breath,  
And scarce their own lives seemed to touch them more  
Than that dead Queen's beside Bœbéis' shore ;  
Bitter and sweet so mingled in them both,  
Their lives and that old tale, they had been loth,  
Perchance, to have them told another way.—  
So passed the sun from that fair summer day.

JUNE drew unto its end, the hot bright days  
Now gat from men as much of blame as praise,  
As rainless still they passed, without a cloud,  
And growing grey at last, the barley bowed  
Before the south-east wind. On such a day  
These folk amid the trellised roses lay,  
And careless for a little while at least,  
Crowned with the mingled blossoms held their feast :  
Nor did the garden lack for younger folk,  
Who cared no more for burning summer's yoke  
Than the sweet breezes of the April-tide ;  
But through the thick trees wandered far and wide  
From sun to shade, and shade to sun again,  
Until they deemed the elders would be fain  
To hear the tale, and shadows longer grew :  
Then round about the grave old men they drew,  
Both youths and maidens ; and beneath their feet  
The grass seemed greener, and the flowers more sweet  
Unto the elders, as they stood around.

So through the calm air soon arose the sound  
Of one old voice as now a Wanderer spoke.  
“ O friends, and ye, fair loving gentle folk,

Would I could better tell a tale to-day ;  
But hark to this, which while our good ship lay  
Within the Weser such a while ago,  
A Fleming told me, as we sat alone  
One Sunday evening in the Rose-garland,  
And all the other folk were gone a-land  
After their pleasure, like sea-faring men.  
Surely I deem it no great wonder then  
That I remember everything he said,  
Since from that Sunday eve strange fortune led  
That keel and me on such a weary way—  
Well, at the least it serveth you to-day.”

## THE LADY OF THE LAND.

## ARGUMENT.

A CERTAIN man having landed on an island in the Greek Sea, found there a beautiful damsel, whom he would fain have delivered from a strange and dreadful doom, but failing herein, he died soon afterwards.

IT happened once, some men of Italy  
Midst the Greek Islands went a sea-roving,  
And much good fortune had they on the sea :  
Of many a man they had the ransoming,  
And many a chain they gat, and goodly thing ;  
And midst their voyage to an isle they came,  
Whereof my story keepeth not the name.

Now though but little was there left to gain,  
Because the richer folk had gone away,  
Yet since by this of water they were fain  
They came to anchor in a land-locked bay,  
Whence in a while some went ashore to play,  
Going but lightly armed in twos or threes,  
For midst that folk they feared no enemies.

And of these fellows that thus went ashore,  
One was there who left all his friends behind ;  
Who going inland ever more and more,  
And being left quite alone, at last did find  
A lonely valley sheltered from the wind,  
Wherein, amidst an ancient cypress wood,  
A long-deserted ruined castle stood.

The wood, once ordered in fair grove and glade,  
With gardens overlooked by terraces,  
And marble-pavéd pools for pleasure made,  
Was tangled now, and choked with fallen trees ;  
And he who went there, with but little ease  
Must stumble by the stream's side, once made meet  
For tender women's dainty wandering feet.

The raven's croak, the low wind choked and drear,  
The baffled stream, the grey wolf's doleful cry,  
Were all the sounds that mariner could hear,  
As through the wood he wandered painfully ;  
But as unto the house he drew anigh,  
The pillars of a ruined shrine he saw,  
The once fair temple of a fallen law.

No image was there left behind to tell  
Before whose face the knees of men had bowed ;  
An altar of black stone, of old wrought well,  
Alone beneath a ruined roof now showed  
The goal whereto the folk were wont to crowd,



Seeking for things forgotten long ago,  
Praying for heads long ages laid a-low.

Close to the temple was the castle-gate,  
Doorless and crumbling ; there our fellow turned,  
Trembling indeed at what might chance to wait  
The prey entrapped, yet with a heart that burned  
To know the most of what might there be learned,  
And hoping somewhat too, amid his fear,  
To light on such things as all men hold dear.

Noble the house was, nor seemed built for war,  
But rather like the work of other days,  
When men, in better peace than now they are,  
Had leisure on the world around to gaze,  
And noted well the past times' changing ways ;  
And fair with sculptured stories it was wrought,  
By lapse of time unto dim ruin brought.

Now as he looked about on all these things,  
And strove to read the mouldering histories,  
Above the door an image with wide wings,  
Whose unclad limbs a serpent seemed to seize,  
He dimly saw, although the western breeze,  
And years of biting frost and washing rain,  
Had made the carver's labour well-nigh vain.

But this, though perished sore, and worn away,  
He noted well, because it seemed to be,

After the fashion of another day,  
Some great man's badge of war, or armoury,  
And round it a carved wreath he seemed to see :  
But taking note of these things, at the last  
The mariner beneath the gateway passed.

And there a lovely cloistered court he found,  
A fountain in the midst o'erthrown and dry,  
And in the cloister briers twining round  
The slender shafts ; the wondrous imagery  
Outworn by more than many years gone by,  
Because the country people, in their fear  
Of wizardry, had wrought destruction here ;

And piteously these fair things had been maimed ,  
There stood great Jove, lacking his head of might ;  
Here was the archer, swift Apollo, lamed ;  
The shapely limbs of Venus hid from sight  
By weeds and shards ; Diana's ankles light  
Bound with the cable of some coasting ship ;  
And rusty nails through Helen's maddening lip.

Therefrom unto the chambers did he pass,  
And found them fair still, midst of their decay,  
Though in them now no sign of man there was,  
And everything but stone had passed away  
That made them lovely in that vanished day ;  
Nay, the mere walls themselves would soon be gone  
And nought be left but heaps of mouldering stone.

But he, when all the place he had gone o'er,  
And with much trouble clomb the broken stair,  
And from the topmost turret seen the shore  
And his good ship drawn up at anchor there,  
Came down again, and found a crypt most fair  
Built wonderfully beneath the greatest hall,  
And there he saw a door within the wall,

Well-hinged, close shut ; nor was there in that place  
Another on its hinges, therefore he  
Stood there and pondered for a little space,  
And thought, "Perchance some marvel I shall see,  
For surely here some dweller there must be,  
Because this door seems whole, and new, and sound.  
While nought but ruin I can see around."

So with that word, moved by a strong desire,  
He tried the hasp, that yielded to his hand,  
And in a strange place, lit as by a fire  
Unseen but near, he presently did stand ;  
And by an odorous breeze his face was fanned,  
As though in some Arabian plain he stood,  
Anigh the border of a spice-tree wood.

He moved not for awhile, but looking round,  
He wondered much to see the place so fair,  
Because, unlike the castle above ground,  
No pillager or wrecker had been there ;  
It seemed that time had passed on elsewhere,

Nor laid a finger on this hidden place,  
Rich with the wealth of some forgotten race.

With hangings, fresh as when they left the loom,  
The walls were hung a space above the head,  
Slim ivory chairs were set about the room,  
And in one corner was a dainty bed,  
That seemed for some fair queen apparelléd ;  
And marble was the worst stone of the floor,  
That with rich Indian webs was covered o'er.

The wanderer trembled when he saw all this,  
Because he deemed by magic it was wrought ;  
Yet in his heart a longing for some bliss,  
Whereof the hard and changing world knows nought.  
Arose and urged him on, and dimmed the thought  
That there perchance some devil lurked to slay  
The heedless wanderer from the light of day.

Over against him was another door  
Set in the wall, so, casting fear aside,  
With hurried steps he crossed the varied floor,  
And there again the silver latch he tried  
And with no pain the door he opened wide,  
And entering the new chamber cautiously  
The glory of great heaps of gold could see.

Upon the floor uncounted medals lay,  
Like things of little value ; here and there

Stood golden caldrons, that might well outweigh  
The biggest midst an emperor's copper-ware,  
And golden cups were set on tables fair,  
Themselves of gold ; and in all hollow things  
Were stored great gems, worthy the crowns of kings.

The walls and roof with gold were overlaid,  
And precious raiment from the wall hung down ;  
The fall of kings that treasure might have stayed,  
Or gained some longing conqueror great renown,  
Or built again some god-destroyed old town ;  
What wonder, if this plunderer of the sea  
Stood gazing at it long and dizzily ?

But at the last his troubled eyes and dazed  
He lifted from the glory of that gold,  
And then the image, that well-nigh erased  
Over the castle-gate he did behold,  
Above a door well wrought in coloured gold  
Again he saw ; a naked girl with wings  
Enfolded in a serpent's scaly rings.

And even as his eyes were fixed on it  
A woman's voice came from the other side,  
And through his heart strange hopes began to flit  
That in some wondrous land he might abide  
Not dying, master of a deathless bride,  
So o'er the gold which now he scarce could see  
He went, and passed this last door eagerly.

Then in a room he stood wherein there was  
A marble bath, whose brimming water yet  
Was scarcely still ; a vessel of green glass  
Half full of odorous ointment was there set  
Upon the topmost step that still was wet,  
And jewelled shoes and women's dainty gear,  
Lay cast upon the varied pavement near.

In one quick glance these things his eyes did see,  
But speedily they turned round to behold  
Another sight, for throned on ivory  
There sat a woman, whose wet tresses rolled  
On to the floor in waves of gleaming gold,  
Cast back from such a form as, erewhile shown  
To one poor shepherd, lighted up Troy town.

Naked she was, the kisses of her feet  
Upon the floor a dying path had made  
From the full bath unto her ivory seat ;  
In her right hand, upon her bosom laid,  
She held a golden comb, a mirror weighed  
Her left hand down, aback her fair head lay  
Dreaming awake of some long vanished day.

Her eyes were shut, but she seemed not to sleep,  
Her lips were murmuring things unheard and low,  
Or sometimes twitched as though she needs must weep  
Though from her eyes the tears refused to flow,  
And oft with heavenly red her cheek did glow,

As if remembrance of some half-sweet shame  
Across the web of many memories came.

There stood the man, scarce daring to draw breath  
For fear the lovely sight should fade away ;  
Forgetting heaven, forgetting life and death,  
Trembling for fear lest something he should say  
Unwitting, lest some sob should yet betray  
His presence there, for to his eager eyes  
Already did the tears begin to rise.

But as he gazed she moved, and with a sigh  
Bent forward, dropping down her golden head ,  
“ Alas, alas ! another day gone by,  
Another day and no soul come,” she said ;  
“ Another year, and still I am not dead !”  
And with that word once more her head she raised,  
And on the trembling man with great eyes gazed.

Then he imploring hands to her did reach,  
And toward her very slowly 'gan to move  
And with wet eyes her pity did beseech,  
And seeing her about to speak he strove  
From trembling lips to utter words of love ;  
But with a look she stayed his doubtful feet,  
And made sweet music as their eyes did meet.

For now she spoke in gentle voice and clear,  
Using the Greek tongue that he knew full well ;

“What man art thou, that thus hast wandered here,  
And found this lonely chamber where I dwell?  
Beware, beware! for I have many a spell;  
If greed of power and gold have led thee on,  
Not lightly shall this untold wealth be won.

“But if thou com’st here, knowing of my tale,  
In hope to bear away my body fair,  
Stout must thine heart be, nor shall that avail  
If thou a wicked soul in thee dost bear;  
So once again I bid thee to beware,  
Because no base man things like this may see,  
And live thereafter long and happily.”

“Lady,” he said, “in Florence is my home,  
And in my city noble is my name;  
Neither on peddling voyage am I come,  
But, like my fathers, bent to gather fame;  
And though thy face has set my heart a-flame  
Yet of thy story nothing do I know,  
But here have wandered heedlessly enow.

“But since the sight of thee mine eyes did bless,  
What can I be but thine? what wouldst thou have?  
From those thy words, I deem from some distress  
By deeds of mine thy dear life I might save;  
O then, delay not! if one ever gave  
His life to any, mine I give to thee;  
Come, tell me what the price of love must be?



“Swift death, to be with thee a day and night  
And with the earliest dawning to be slain ?  
Or better, a long year of great delight,  
And many years of misery and pain ?  
Or worse, and this poor hour for all my gain ?  
A sorry merchant am I on this day,  
E’en as thou wilt so must I obey.”

She said, “What brave words ! nought divine am I,  
But an unhappy and unheard-of maid  
Compelled by evil fate and destiny  
To live, who long ago should have been laid  
Under the earth within the cypress shade.  
Hearken awhile, and quickly shalt thou know  
What deed I pray thee to accomplish now.

“God grant indeed thy words are not for nought !  
Then shalt thou save me, since for many a day  
To such a dreadful life I have been brought :  
Nor will I spare with all my heart to pay  
What man soever takes my grief away ;  
Ah ! I will love thee, if thou lovest me  
But well enough my saviour now to be.

“My father lived a many years ago  
Lord of this land, master of all cunning,  
Who ruddy gold could draw from out grey stone,  
And gather wealth from many an uncouth thing,  
He made the wilderness rejoice and sing,

And such a leech he was that none could say  
Without his word what soul should pass away.

“Unto Diana such a gift he gave,  
Goddess above, below, and on the earth,  
That I should be her virgin and her slave  
From the first hour of my most wretched birth ;  
Therefore my life had known but little mirth  
When I had come unto my twentieth year  
And the last time of hallowing drew anear.

“So in her temple had I lived and died  
And all would long ago have passed away,  
But ere that time came, did strange things betide,  
Whereby I am alive unto this day ;  
Alas, the bitter words that I must say !  
Ah ! can I bring my wretched tongue to tell  
How I was brought unto this fearful hell.

“A queen I was, what gods I knew I loved,  
And nothing evil was there in my thought,  
And yet by love my wretched heart was moved  
Until to utter ruin I was brought !  
Alas ! thou sayest our gods were vain and nought,  
Wait, wait, till thou hast heard this tale of mine.  
Then shalt thou think them devilish or divine.

“Hearken ! in spite of father and of vow  
I loved a man ; but for that sin I think

Men had forgiven me—yea, yea, even thou ;  
But from the gods the full cup must I drink,  
And into misery unheard of sink,  
Tormented when their own names are forgot,  
And men must doubt e'er if they lived or not.

'Glorious my lover was unto my sight,  
Most beautiful,—of love we grew so fain  
That we at last agreed, that on a night  
We should be happy, but that he were slain  
Or shut in hold, and neither joy nor pain  
Should else forbid that hoped-for time to be ;  
So came the night that made a wretch of me.

“Ah ! well do I remember all that night,  
When through the window shone the orb of June,  
And by the bed flickered the taper's light,  
Whereby I trembled, gazing at the moon :  
Ah me ! the meeting that we had, when soon  
Into his strong, well-trusted arms I fell,  
And many a sorrow we began to tell.

“Ah me ! what parting on that night we had !  
I think the story of my great despair  
A little while might merry folk make sad ;  
For, as he swept away my yellow hair  
To make my shoulder and my bosom bare,  
I raised mine eyes, and shuddering could behold  
A shadow cast upon the bed of gold :

“Then suddenly was quenched my hot desire  
And he untwined his arms ; the moon so pale  
A while ago, seemed changed to blood and fire,  
And yet my limbs beneath me did not fail,  
And neither had I strength to cry or wail,  
But stood there helpless, bare, and shivering,  
With staring eyes still fixed upon the thing.

“Because the shade that on the bed of gold  
The changed and dreadful moon was throwing down  
Was of Diana, whom I did behold,  
With knotted hair, and shining girt-up gown,  
And on the high white brow, a deadly frown  
Bent upon us, who stood scarce drawing breath,  
Striving to meet the horrible sure death.

“No word at all the dreadful goddess said,  
But soon across my feet my lover lay,  
And well indeed I knew that he was dead ;  
And would that I had died on that same day !  
For in a while the image turned away,  
And without words my doom I understood,  
And felt a horror change my human blood.

“And there I fell, and on the floor I lay  
By the dead man, till daylight came on me,  
And not a word thenceforward could I say  
For three years, till of grief and misery.  
The lingering pest, the cruel enemy,

My father and his folk were dead and gone,  
And in this castle I was left alone :

“ And then the doom foreseen upon me fell,  
For Queen Diana did my body change  
Into a fork-tongued dragon flesh and fell,  
And through the island nightly do I range,  
Or in the green sea mate with monsters strange,  
When in the middle of the moonlit night  
The sleepy mariner I do affright,

“ But all day long upon this gold I lie  
Within this place, where never mason’s hand  
Smote trowel on the marble noisily ;  
Drowsy I lie, no folk at my command,  
Who once was called the Lady of the Land ;  
Who might have bought a kingdom with a kiss,  
Yea, half the world with such a sight as this.”

And therewithal, with rosy fingers light,  
Backward her heavy-hanging hair she threw,  
To give her naked beauty more to sight ;  
But when, forgetting all the things he knew,  
Maddened with love unto the prize he drew,  
She cried, “ Nay, wait ! for wherefore wilt thou die,  
Why should we not be happy, thou and I ?

“ Wilt thou not save me ? once in every year  
This rightful form of mine that thou dost see

By favour of the goddess have I here  
From sunrise unto sunset given me,  
That some brave man may end my misery.  
And thou—art thou not brave? can thy heart fail,  
Whose eyes e'en now are weeping at my tale?

“Then listen! when this day is overpast,  
A fearful monster shall I be again,  
And thou mayst be my saviour at the last,  
Unless, once more, thy words are nought and vain;  
If thou of love and sovereignty art fain,  
Come thou next morn, and when thou seest here  
A hideous dragon, have thereof no fear,

“But take the loathsome head up in thine hands,  
And kiss it, and be master presently  
Of twice the wealth that is in all the lands,  
From Cathay to the head of Italy;  
And master also, if it pleaseth thee,  
Of all thou praisest as so fresh and bright,  
Of what thou callest crown of all delight.

“Ah! with what joy then shall I see again  
The sunlight on the green grass and the trees,  
And hear the clatter of the summer rain,  
And see the joyous folk beyond the seas.  
Ah, me! to hold my child upon my knees,  
After the weeping of unkindly tears,  
And all the wrongs of these four hundred years.

“Go now, go quick ! leave this grey heap of stone ;  
And from thy glad heart think upon thy way,  
How I shall love thee—yea, love thee alone,  
That bringest me from dark death unto day ;  
For this shall be thy wages and thy pay ;  
Unheard-of wealth, unheard-of love is near,  
If thou hast heart a little dread to bear.”

Therewith she turned to go ; but he cried out,  
“Ah ! wilt thou leave me then without one kiss,  
To slay the very seeds of fear and doubt,  
That glad to-morrow may bring certain bliss ?  
Hast thou forgotten how love lives by this,  
The memory of some hopeful close embrace,  
Low whispered words within some lonely place ?”

But she, when his bright glittering eyes she saw,  
And burning cheeks, cried out, “Alas, alas !  
Must I be quite undone, and wilt thou draw  
A worse fate on me than the first one was ?  
O haste thee from this fatal place to pass !  
Yet, ere thou goest, take this, lest thou shouldst deem  
Thou hast been fooled by some strange midday dream.”

So saying, blushing like a new-kissed maid,  
From off her neck a little gem she drew,  
That, ’twixt those snowy rose-tinged hillocks laid,  
The secrets of her glorious beauty knew ;  
And ere he well perceived what she would do,

She touched his hand, the gem within it lay,  
And, turning, from his sight she fled away.

Then at the doorway where her rosy heel  
Had glanced and vanished, he awhile did stare,  
And still upon his hand he seemed to feel  
The varying kisses of her fingers fair ;  
Then turned he toward the dreary crypt and bare,  
And dizzily throughout the castle passed,  
Till by the ruined fane he stood at last.

Then weighing still the gem within his hand,  
He stumbled backward through the cypress wood,  
Thinking the while of some strange lovely land,  
Where all his life should be most fair and good ;  
Till on the valley's wall of hills he stood,  
And slowly thence passed down unto the bay  
Red with the death of that bewildering day.

THE next day came, and he, who all the night  
Had ceaselessly been turning in his bed,  
Arose and clad himself in armour bright,  
And many a danger he remembered ;  
Storming of towns, lone sieges full of dread,  
That with renown his heart had borne him through,  
And this thing seemed a little thing to do.



So on he went, and on the way he thought  
Of all the glorious things of yesterday,  
Nought of the price whereat they must be bought,  
But ever to himself did softly say,  
“No roaming now, my wars are passed away,  
No long dull days devoid of happiness,  
When such a love my yearning heart shall bless.”

Thus to the castle did he come at last,  
But when unto the gateway he drew near,  
And underneath its ruined archway passed  
Into the court, a strange noise did he hear,  
And through his heart there shot a pang of fear,  
Trembling, he gat his sword into his hand,  
And midmost of the cloisters took his stand.

But for a while that unknown noise increased  
A rattling, that with strident roars did blend,  
And whining moans ; but suddenly it ceased,  
A fearful thing stood at the cloister's end,  
And eyed him for a while, then 'gan to wend  
Adown the cloisters, and began again  
That rattling, and the moan like fiends in pain.

And as it came on towards him, with its teeth  
The body of a slain goat did it tear,  
The blood whereof in its hot jaws did seethe,  
And on its tongue he saw the smoking hair ;  
Then his heart sank, and standing trembling there.

'Throughout his mind wild thoughts and fearful ran,  
"Some fiend she was," he said, "the bane of man."

Yet he abode her still, although his blood  
Curdled within him : the thing dropped the goat,  
And creeping on, came close to where he stood,  
And raised its head to him, and wrinkled throat,  
Then he cried out and wildly at her smote,  
Shutting his eyes, and turned and from the place  
Ran swiftly, with a white and ghastly face.

But little things rough stones and tree-trunks seemed,  
And if he fell, he rose and ran on still ;  
No more he felt his hurts than if he dreamed,  
He made no stay for valley or steep hill,  
Heedless he dashed through many a foaming rill,  
Until he came unto the ship at last  
And with no word into the deep hold passed.

Meanwhile the dragon, seeing him clean gone,  
Followed him not, but crying horribly,  
Caught up within her jaws a block of stone  
And ground it into powder, then turned she,  
With cries that folk could hear far out at sea,  
And reached the treasure set apart of old,  
To brood above the hidden heaps of gold.

Yet was she seen again on many a day  
By some half-waking mariner, or herd,

Playing amid the ripples of the bay,  
Or on the hills making all things afeard,  
Or in the wood, that did that castle gird,  
But never any man again durst go  
To seek her woman's form, and end her woe.

As for the man, who knows what things he bore?  
What mournful faces peopled the sad night,  
What wailings vexed him with reproaches sore,  
What images of that nigh-gained delight!  
What dreamed caresses from soft hands and white,  
Turning to horrors ere they reached the best,  
What struggles vain, what shame, what huge unrest?

No man he knew, three days he lay and raved,  
And cried for death, until a lethargy  
Fell on him, and his fellows thought him saved;  
But on the third night he awoke to die;  
And at Byzantium doth his body lie  
Between two blossoming pomegranate trees,  
Within the churchyard of the Genoese.

A MOMENT'S silence as his tale had end,  
And then the wind of that June night did blend  
Their varied voices, as of that and this  
They fell to talk : of those fair islands' bliss  
They knew in other days, of hope they had  
To live there long an easy life and glad,  
With nought to vex them ; and the younger men  
Began to nourish strange dreams even then  
Of sailing east, as these had once sailed west ;  
Because the story of that luckless quest  
With hope, not fear, had filled their joyous hearts  
And made them dream of new and noble parts  
That they might act ; of raising up the name  
Their fathers bore, and winning boundless fame.

These too with little patience seemed to hear,  
That story end with shame and grief and fear ;  
A little thing the man had had to do,  
They said, if longing burned within him so.  
But at their words the older men must bow  
Their heads, and, smiling, somewhat thoughtful grow,  
Remembering well how fear in days gone by  
Had dealt with them, and poisoned wretchedly  
Good days, good deeds, and longings for all good :  
Yet on the evil times they would not brood,  
But sighing, strove to raise the weight of years,  
And no more memory of their hopes and fears  
They nourished, but such gentle thoughts as fed  
The pensiveness which that sweet season bred.

## JULY.

FAIR was the morn to-day, the blossom's scent  
    Floated across the fresh grass, and the bees  
With low vexed song from rose to lily went,  
A gentle wind was in the heavy trees,  
And thine eyes shone with joyous memories ;  
Fair was the early morn, and fair wert thou,  
And I was happy—Ah, be happy now !

Peace and content without us, love within  
That hour there was, now thunder and wild rain,  
Have wrapped the cowering world, and foolish sin,  
And nameless pride, have made us wise in vain ;  
Ah, love ! although the morn shall come again,  
And on new rose-buds the new sun shall smile,  
Can we regain what we have lost meanwhile ?

E'en now the west grows clear of storm and threat,  
But midst the lightning did the fair sun die—  
—Ah, he shall rise again for ages yet,  
He cannot waste his life—but thou and I—  
Who knows if next morn this felicity  
My lips may feel, or if thou still shalt live  
This seal of love renewed once more to give ?

WITHIN a lovely valley, watered well  
With flowery streams, the July feast befell,  
And there within the Chief-priest's fair abode  
They cast aside their trouble's heavy load,  
Scarce made weary by the sultry day.  
The earth no longer laboured ; shaded lay  
The sweet-breathed kine, across the sunny vale,  
From hill to hill the wandering rook did sail,  
Lazily croaking, midst his dreams of spring,  
Nor more awake the pink-foot dove did cling  
Unto the beech-bough, murmuring now and then ;  
All rested but the restless sons of men  
And the great sun that wrought this happiness,  
And all the vale with fruitful hopes did bless.

So in a marble chamber bright with flowers,  
The old men feasted through the fresher hours,  
And at the hottest time of all the day  
When now the sun was on his downward way,  
Sat listening to a tale an elder told,  
New to his fathers while they yet did hold  
The cities of some far-off Grecian isle,  
Though in the heavens the cloud of force and guile  
Was gathering dark that sent them o'er the sea  
To win new lands for their posterity.

## THE SON OF CRÆSUS.

### ARGUMENT.

CRÆSUS, King of Lydia, dreamed that he saw his son slain by an iron weapon, and though by every means he strove to avert this doom from him, yet thus it happened, for his son was slain by the hand of the man who seemed least of all likely to do the deed.

OF Cræsus tells my tale, a king of old  
In Lydia, ere the Mede fell on the land,  
A man made mighty by great heaps of gold,  
Feared for the myriads strong of heart and hand  
That 'neath his banners wrought out his command,  
And though his latter ending happed on ill,  
Yet first of every joy he had his fill.

Two sons he had, and one was dumb from birth ;  
The other one, that Atys had to name,  
Grew up a fair youth, and of might and worth,  
And well it seemed the race wherefrom he came  
From him should never get reproach or shame :  
But yet no stroke he struck before his death,  
In no war-shout he spent his latest breath.

Now Cræsus, lying on his bed anight,  
Dreamed that he saw this dear son laid a-low,  
And folk lamenting he was slain outright,  
And that some iron thing had dealt the blow ;  
By whose hand guided he could nowise know,  
Or if in peace by traitors it were done,  
Or in some open war not yet begun.

Three times one night this vision broke his sleep,  
So that at last he rose up from his bed,  
That he might ponder how he best might keep  
The threatened danger from so dear a head ;  
And, since he now was old enough to wed,  
The King sent men to search the lands around,  
Until some matchless maiden should be found ;

That in her arms this Atys might forget  
The praise of men, and fame of history,  
Whereby full many a field has been made wet  
With blood of men, and many a deep green sea  
Been reddened therewithal, and yet shall be ;  
That her sweet voice might drown the people's praise.  
Her eyes make bright the uneventful days.

So when at last a wonder they had brought,  
From some sweet land down by the ocean's rim,  
Than whom no fairer could by man be thought,  
And ancient dames, scanning her limb by limb,  
Had said that she was fair enough for him,



To her was Atys married with much show,  
And looked to dwell with her in bliss enow.

And in meantime afield he never went,  
Either to hunting or the frontier war,  
No dart was cast, nor any engine bent  
Anigh him, and the Lydian men afar  
Must rein their steeds, and the bright blossoms mar  
If they have any lust of tourney now,  
And in far meadows must they bend the bow.

And also through the palace everywhere  
The swords and spears were taken from the wall  
That long with honour had been hanging there,  
And from the golden pillars of the hall;  
Lest by mischance some sacred blade should fall,  
And in its falling bring revenge at last  
For many a fatal battle overpast.

And every day King Croesus wrought with care  
To save his dear son from that threatened end,  
And many a beast he offered up with prayer  
Unto the gods, and much of wealth did spend,  
That they so prayed might yet perchance defend  
That life, until at least that he were dead,  
With earth laid heavy on his unseeing head.

But in the midst even of the wedding feast  
There came a man, who by the golden hall

Sat down upon the steps, and man or beast  
He heeded not, but there against the wall  
He leaned his head, speaking no word at all,  
Till, with his son and son's wife, came the King,  
And then unto his gown the man did cling.

“What man art thou?” the King said to him then,  
“That in such guise thou prayest on thy knee;  
Hast thou some fell foe here among my men?  
Or hast thou done an ill deed unto me,  
Or has thy wife been carried over sea?  
Or hast thou on this day great need of gold?  
Or say, why else thou now art grown so bold.”

“O King,” he said, “I ask no gold to-day,  
And though indeed thy greatness drew me here,  
No wrong have I that thou couldst wipe away;  
And nought of mine the pirate folk did bear  
Across the sea; none of thy folk I fear:  
But all the gods are now mine enemies,  
Therefore I kneel before thee on my knees.

“For as with mine own brother on a day  
Within the running place at home I played,  
Unwittingly I smote him such-a-way  
That dead upon the green grass he was laid;  
Half-dead myself I fled away dismayed,  
Wherefore I pray thee help me in my need.  
And purify my soul of this sad deed.

“If of my name and country thou wouldst know,  
In Phrygia yet my father is a king,  
Gordius, the son of Midas, rich enow  
In corn and cattle, golden cup and ring;  
And mine own name before I did this thing  
Was called Adrastus, whom, in street and hall,  
The slayer of his brother men now call.”

“Friend,” said the King, “have thou no fear of me;  
For though, indeed, I am right happy now,  
Yet well I know this may not always be,  
And I may chance some day to kneel full low.  
And to some happy man mine head to bow  
With prayers to do a greater thing than this,  
Dwell thou with us, and win again thy bliss.

“For in this city men in sport and play  
Forget the trouble that the gods have sent;  
Who therewithal send wine, and many a may  
As fair as she for whom the Trojan went,  
And many a dear delight besides have lent,  
Which, whoso is well loved of them shall keep  
Till in forgetful death he falls asleep.

“Therefore to-morrow shall those rites be done  
That kindred blood demands that thou hast shed,  
That if the mouth of thine own mother’s son  
Did hap to curse thee ere he was quite dead,  
The curse may lie the lighter on thine head,

Because the flower-crowned head of many a beast  
Has fallen voiceless in our glorious feast."

Then did Adrastus rise and thank the King,  
And the next day when yet low was the sun,  
The sacrifice and every other thing  
That unto these dread rites belonged, was done ;  
And there Adrastus dwelt, hated of none,  
And loved of many, and the King loved him,  
For brave and wise he was and strong of limb.

But chiefly amongst all did Atys love  
The luckless stranger, whose fair tales of war  
The Lydian's heart abundantly did move,  
And much they talked of wandering out afar  
Some day, to lands where many marvels are,  
With still the Phrygian through all things to be  
The leader unto all felicity.

Now at this time folk came unto the King  
Who on a forest's borders dwelling were,  
Wherein there roamed full many a dangerous thing,  
As wolf and wild bull, lion and brown bear ;  
But chiefly in that forest was the lair  
Of a great boar that no man could withstand,  
And many a woe he wrought upon the land.

Since long ago that men in Calydon  
Held chase, no beast like him had once been seen

He ruined vineyards lying in the sun,  
After his harvesting the men must glean  
What he had left ; right glad they had not been  
Among the tall stalks of the ripening wheat,  
The fell destroyer's fatal tusks to meet.

For often would the lonely man entrapped  
In vain from his dire fury strive to hide  
In some thick hedge, and other whiles it happed  
Some careless stranger by his place would ride,  
And the tusks smote his fallen horse's side,  
And what help then to such a wretch could come  
With sword he could not draw, and far from home ?

Or else girls, sent their water-jars to fill,  
Would come back pale, too terrified to cry,  
Because they had but seen him from the hill ;  
Or else again with side rent wretchedly,  
Some hapless damsel midst the brake would lie.  
Shortly to say, there neither man nor maid  
Was safe afield whether they wrought or played.

Therefore were come these dwellers by the wood  
To pray the King brave men to them to send,  
That they might live ; and if he deemed it good,  
That Atys with the other knights should wend,  
They thought their grief the easier should have end ;  
For both by gods and men they knew him loved,  
And easily by hope of glory moved.

“ O Sire,” they said, “ thou know’st how Hercules  
Was not content to wait till folk asked aid,  
But sought the pests among their guarded trees ;  
Thou know’st what name the Theban Cadmus made,  
And how the bull of Marathon was laid  
Dead on the fallows of the Athenian land,  
And how folk worshipped Atalanta’s hand.

“ Fair would thy son’s name look upon the roll  
Wherein such noble deeds as this are told ;  
And great delight shall surely fill thy soul,  
Thinking upon his deeds when thou art old,  
And thy brave heart is waxen faint and cold :  
Dost thou not know, O King, how men will strive  
That they, when dead, still in their sons may live ? ”

He shuddered as they spoke, because he thought,  
Most certainly a winning tale is this  
To draw him from the net where he is caught,  
For hearts of men grow weary of all bliss ;  
Nor is he one to be content with his,  
If he should hear the trumpet-blast of fame  
And far-off people calling on his name.

“ Good friends,” he said, “ go, get ye back again,  
And doubt not I will send you men to slay  
This pest ye fear : yet shall your prayer be vain  
If ye with any other speak to-day ;  
And for my son, with me he needs must stay,

For mighty cares oppress the Lydian land.  
Fear not, for ye shall have a noble band."

And with that promise must they be content,  
And so departed, having feasted well.  
And yet some god or other ere they went,  
If they were silent, this their tale must tell  
To more than one man ; therefore it befell,  
That at the last Prince Atys knew the thing,  
And came with angry eyes unto the King.

" Father," he said, " since when am I grown vile  
Since when am I grown helpless of my hands ?  
Or else what folk, with words enwrought with guile,  
Thine ears have poisoned ; that when far-off lands  
My fame might fill, by thy most strange commands  
I needs must stay within this slothful home,  
Whereto would God that I had never come ?

" What ! wilt thou take mine honour quite away '  
Wouldst thou, that, as with her I just have wed  
I sit among thy folk at end of day,  
She should be ever turning round her head  
To watch some man for war apparelléd  
Because he wears a sword that he may use,  
Which grace to me thou ever wilt refuse ?

" Or dost thou think, when thou hast run thy race  
And thou art gone, and in thy stead I reign,

The people will do honour to my place,  
Or that the lords leal men will still remain,  
If yet my father's sword be sharp in vain ?  
If on the wall his armour still hang up,  
While for a spear I hold a drinking-cup ?”

“ O Son !” quoth Cræsus, “ well I know thee brave  
And worthy of high deeds of chivalry ;  
Therefore the more thy dear life would I save,  
Which now is threatened by the gods on high ;  
Three times one night I dreamed I saw thee die,  
Slain by some deadly iron-pointed thing,  
While weeping lords stood round thee in a ring.”

Then loud laughed Atys, and he said again,  
“ Father, and did this ugly dream tell thee  
What day it was on which I should be slain ?  
As may the gods grant I may one day be,  
And not from sickness die right wretchedly,  
Groaning with pain, my lords about my bed,  
Wishing to God that I were fairly dead ;

“ But slain in battle, as the Lydian kings  
Have died ere now, in some great victory,  
While all about the Lydian shouting rings  
Death to the beaten foemen as they fly.  
What death but this, O father ! should I die ?  
But if my life by iron shall be done,  
What steel to-day shall glitter in the sun ?



“ Yea, father, if to thee it seemeth good  
To keep me from the bright steel-bearing throng,  
Let me be brave at least within the wood ;  
For surely, if thy dream be true, no wrong  
Can hap to me from this beast’s tushes strong :  
Unless perchance the beast is grown so wise,  
He haunts the forest clad in Lydian guise.”

Then Croesus said : “ O Son, I love thee so,  
That thou shalt do thy will upon this tide :  
But since unto this hunting thou must go,  
A trusty friend along with thee shall ride,  
Who not for anything shall leave thy side.  
I think, indeed, he loves thee well enow  
To thrust his heart ’twixt thee and any blow.

“ Go then, O Son, and if by some short span  
Thy life be measured, how shall it harm thee,  
If while life last thou art a happy man ?  
And thou art happy ; only unto me  
Is trembling left, and infelicity :  
The trembling of the man who loves on earth,  
But unto thee is hope and present mirth.”

“ Nay, be thou not ashamed, for on this day  
I fear not much : thou read’st my dream aright,  
No teeth or claws shall take thy life away.  
And it may chance, ere thy last glorious fight,  
I shall be blinded by the endless night ;

And brave Adrastus on this day shall be  
Thy safeguard, and shall give good heart to me.

“Go then, and send him hither, and depart ;  
And as the heroes did so mayst thou do,  
Winning such fame as well may please thine heart.”  
With that word from the King did Atys go,  
Who, left behind, sighed, saying, “May it be so,  
Even as I hope ; and yet I would to God  
These men upon my threshold ne’er had trod.”

So when Adrastus to the King was come  
He said unto him, “O my Phrygian friend,  
We in this land have given thee a home,  
And ’gainst all foes your life will we defend :  
Wherefore for us that life thou shouldest spend,  
If any day there should be need therefor ;  
And now a trusty friend I need right sore.

“Doubtless ere now thou hast heard many say  
There is a doom that threatens my son’s life ;  
Therefore this place is stript of arms to-day,  
And therefore still bides Atys with his wife,  
And tempts not any god by raising strife ;  
Yet none the less by no desire of his,  
To whom would war be most abundant bliss.

“And since to-day some glory he may gain  
Against a monstrous bestial enemy

And that the meaning of my dream is plain ;  
That saith that he by steel alone shall die,  
His burning wish I may not well deny,  
Therefore afield to-morrow doth he wend  
And herein mayst thou show thyself my friend —

“For thou as captain of his band shalt ride,  
And keep a watchful eye of everything,  
Nor leave him whatsoever may betide :  
Lo, thou art brave, the son of a great king,  
And with thy praises doth this city ring,  
Why should I tell thee what a name those gain,  
Who dying for their friends, die not in vain ?”

Then said Adrastus, “Now were I grown base  
Beyond all words, if I should spare for aught  
In guarding him, so sit with smiling face,  
And of this matter take no further thought,  
Because with my life shall his life be bought,  
If ill should hap ; and no ill fate it were,  
If I should die for what I hold so dear.”

Then went Adrastus, and next morn all things,  
That ’longed unto the hunting were well dight,  
And forth they went clad as the sons of kings,  
Fair was the morn, as through the sunshine bright  
They rode, the Prince half wild with great delight,  
The Phrygian smiling on him soberly,  
And ever looking round with watchful eye.

So through the city all the rout rode fast,  
With many a great black-muzzled yellow hound ;  
And then the teeming country-side they passed,  
Until they came to sour and rugged ground,  
And there rode up a little heathy mound,  
That overlooked the scrubby woods and low,  
That of the beast's lair somewhat they might know.

And there a good man of the country-side  
Showed them the places where he mostly lay ;  
And they, descending, through the wood did ride,  
And followed on his tracks for half the day.  
And at the last they brought him well to bay,  
Within an oozy space amidst the wood,  
About the which a ring of alders stood.

So when the hounds' changed voices clear they heard  
With hearts aflame on towards him straight they drew  
Atys the first of all, of nought afeard,  
Except that folk should say some other slew  
The beast ; and lustily his horn he blew,  
Going afoot ; then, mighty spear in hand,  
Adrastus headed all the following band.

Now when they came unto the plot of ground  
Where stood the boar, hounds dead about him lay  
Or sprawled about, bleeding from many a wound,  
But still the others held him well at bay,  
Nor had he been bestead thus ere that day.

But yet, seeing Atys, straight he rushed at him,  
Speckled with foam, bleeding in flank and limb.

Then Atys stood and cast his well-steeled spear  
With a great shout, and straight and well it flew ;  
For now the broad blade cutting through the ear,  
A stream of blood from out the shoulder drew.  
And therewithal another, no less true,  
Adrastus cast, whereby the boar had died :  
But Atys drew the bright sword from his side,

And to the tottering beast he drew anigh :  
But as the sun's rays ran adown the blade  
Adrastus threw a javelin hastily,  
For of the mighty beast was he afraid,  
Lest by his wounds he should not yet be stayed,  
But with a last rush cast his life away,  
And dying there, the son of Croesus slay.

But even as the feathered dart he hurled,  
His strained, despairing eyes, beheld the end,  
And changed seemed all the fashion of the world,  
And past and future into one did blend,  
As he beheld the fixed eyes of his friend,  
That no reproach had in them, and no fear,  
For Death had seized him ere he thought him near.

Adrastus shrieked, and running up he caught  
The falling man, and from his bleeding side

Drew out the dart, and seeing that death had brought  
Deliverance to him, he thereby had died ;  
But ere his hand the luckless steel could guide,  
And he the refuge of poor souls could win,  
The horror-stricken huntsmen had rushed in.

And these, with blows and cries he heeded nought,  
His unresisting hands made haste to bind ;  
Then of the alder-boughs a bier they wrought,  
And laid the corpse thereon, and 'gan to wind  
Homeward amidst the tangled wood and blind,  
And going slowly, at the eventide,  
Some leagues from Sardis did that day abide.

Onward next morn the slaughtered man they bore,  
With him that slew him, and at end of day  
They reached the city, and with mourning sore  
Toward the King's palace did they take their way.  
He in an open western chamber lay  
Feasting, though inwardly his heart did burn  
Until that Atys should to him return.

And when those wails first smote upon his ear  
He set the wine-cup down, and to his feet  
He rose, and bitter all-consuming fear  
Swallowed his joy, and nigh he went to meet  
That which was coming through the weeping street :  
But in the end he thought it good to wait,  
And stood there doubting all the ills of fate.

But when at last up to that royal place  
Folk brought the thing he once had held so dear  
Still stood the King, staring with ghastly face  
As they brought forth Adrastus and the bier,  
But spoke at last, slowly without a tear,  
“ O Phrygian man, that I did purify,  
Is it through thee that Atys came to die ?”

“ O King,” Adrastus said, “ take now my life,  
With whatso torment seemeth good to thee,  
As my word went, for I would end this strife,  
And underneath the earth lie quietly ;  
Nor is it my will here alive to be :  
For as my brother, so Prince Atys died,  
And this unlucky hand some god did guide.”

Then as a man constrained, the tale he told  
From end to end, nor spared himself one whit :  
And as he spoke, the wood did still behold,  
The trodden grass, and Atys dead on it ;  
And many a change o’er the King’s face did flit  
Of kingly rage, and hatred and despair,  
As on the slayer’s face he still did stare.

At last he said, “ Thy death avails me nought,  
The gods themselves have done this bitter deed,  
That I was all too happy was their thought,  
Therefore thy heart is dead and mine doth bleed,  
And I am helpless as a trodden weed :

Thou art but as the handle of the spear,  
The caster sits far off from any fear.

“Yet, if thy hurt they meant, I can do this,—  
—Loose him and let him go in peace from me—  
I will not slay the slayer of all my bliss ;  
Yet go, poor man, for when thy face I see  
I curse the gods for their felicity.  
Surely some other slayer they would have found,  
If thou hadst long ago been under ground.

“Alas, Adrastus ! in my inmost heart  
I knew the gods would one day do this thing,  
But deemed indeed that it would be thy part  
To comfort me amidst my sorrowing ;  
Make haste to go, for I am still a King !  
Madness may take me, I have many hands  
Who will not spare to do my worst commands.”

With that Adrastus' bonds were done away,  
And forthwith to the city gates he ran,  
And on the road where they had been that day  
Rushed through the gathering night ; and some lone man  
Beheld next day his visage wild and wan,  
Peering from out a thicket of the wood  
Where he had spilt that well-belovéd blood.

And now the day of burial pomp must be,  
And to those rites all lords of Lydia came



About the King, and that day, they and he  
Cast royal gifts of rich things on the flame ;  
But while they stood and wept, and called by name  
Upon the dead, amidst them came a man  
With raiment rent, and haggard face and wan :

Who when the marshals would have thrust him out  
And men looked strange on him, began to say,  
“ Surely the world is changed since ye have doubt  
Of who I am ; nay, turn me not away,  
For ye have called me princely ere to-day—  
Adrastus, son of Gordius, a great king,  
Where unto Pallas Phrygian maidens sing.

“ O Lydians, many a rich thing have ye cast  
Into this flame, but I myself will give  
A greater gift, since now I see at last  
The gods are wearied for that still I live,  
And with their will, why should I longer strive ?  
Atys, O Atys, thus I give to thee  
A life that lived for thy felicity.”

And therewith from his side a knife he drew,  
And, crying out, upon the pile he leapt,  
And with one mighty stroke himself he slew  
So there these princes both together slept,  
And their light ashes, gathered up, were kept  
Within a golden vessel wrought all o’er  
With histories of this hunting of the boar.

A GENTLE wind had risen midst his tale,  
That bore the sweet scents of the fertile vale  
In at the open windows ; and these men  
The burden of their years scarce noted then,  
Soothed by the sweet luxurious summer time,  
And by the cadence of that ancient rhyme,  
Spite of its saddening import ; nay, indeed,  
Of some such thoughts the Wanderers had need  
As that tale gave them—Yea, a man shall be  
A wonder for his glorious chivalry,  
First in all wisdom, of a prudent mind,  
Yet none the less him too his fate shall find  
Unfenced by these, a man 'mongst other men.  
Yea, and will Fortune pick out, now and then,  
The noblest for the anvil of her blows ;  
Great names are few, and yet, indeed, who knows  
What greater souls have fallen 'neath the stroke  
Of careless fate ? Purbblind are most of folk,  
The happy are the masters of the earth  
Which ever give small heed to hapless worth ;  
So goes the world, and this we needs must bear  
Like eld and death : yet there were some men there  
Who drank in silence to the memory  
Of those who failed on earth great men to be,  
Though better than the men who won the crown.

But when the sun was fairly going down  
They left the house, and, following up the stream,  
In the low sun saw the kingfisher gleam  
'Twixt bank and alder, and the grebe steal out  
From the high sedge, and, in his restless doubt,  
Dive down, and rise to see what men were there :  
They saw the swallow chase high up in air  
The circling gnats ; the shaded dusky pool  
Broke by the splashing chub ; the ripple cool,  
Rising and falling, of some distant weir  
They heard, till it oppressed the listening ear,  
As twilight grew : so back they turned again  
Glad of their rest, and pleasure after pain.

WITHIN the gardens once again they met,  
That now the roses did well-nigh forget,  
For hot July was drawing to an end,  
And August came the fainting year to mend  
With fruit and grain ; so 'neath the trellises,  
Nigh blossomless, did they lie well at ease,  
And watched the poppies burn across the grass,  
And o'er the bindweed's bells the brown bee pass  
Still murmuring of his gains : windless and bright  
The morn had been, to help their dear delight ;  
But heavy clouds ere noon grew round the sun,  
And, halfway to the zenith, wild and dun  
The sky grew, and the thunder growled afar ;  
But, ere the steely clouds began their war,  
A change there came, and, as by some great hand,  
The clouds that hung in threatening o'er the land  
Were drawn away ; then a light wind arose  
That shook the light stems of that flowery close,  
And made men sigh for pleasure ; therewithal  
Did mirth upon the feasting elders fall,  
And they no longer watched the lowering sky,  
But called aloud for some new history.

Then spoke the Suabian, "Sirs, this tale is told  
Among our searchers for fine stones and gold,  
And though I tell it wrong be good to me ;  
For I the written book did never see,  
Made by some Fleming, as I think, wherein  
Is told this tale of wilfulness and sin."

THE  
WATCHING OF THE FALCON.

ARGUMENT.

THE case of this falcon was such, that whoso watched it without sleeping for seven days and seven nights, had his wish granted him by a fay lady, that appeared to him thereof and some wished one thing, and some another. But certain king, who watched the falcon daily, would wish for nought but the love of that fay; which wish being accomplished, was afterwards his ruin.

A CROSS the sea a land there is,  
Where, if fate will, may men have bliss,  
For it is fair as any land :  
There hath the reaper a full hand,  
While in the orchard hangs aloft  
The purple fig, a-growing soft ;  
And fair the trellised vine-bunches  
Are swung across the high elm-trees ;  
And in the rivers great fish play,  
While over them pass day by day  
The laden barges to their place.  
There maids are straight, and fair of face,

And men are stout for husbandry,  
And all is well as it can be  
Upon this earth where all has end.

For on them God is pleased to send  
The gift of Death down from above,  
That envy, hatred, and hot love,  
Knowledge with hunger by his side,  
And avarice and deadly pride,  
There may have end like everything  
Both to the shepherd and the king :  
Lest this green earth become but hell  
If folk for ever there should dwell.

Full little most men think of this,  
But half in woe and half in bliss  
They pass their lives, and die at last  
Unwilling, though their lot be cast  
In wretched places of the earth,  
Where men have little joy from birth  
Until they die ; in no such case  
Were those who tilled this pleasant place.

There soothly men were loth to die,  
Though sometimes in his misery  
A man would say " Would I were dead !"  
Alas ! full little likelihead  
That he should live for ever there.

So folk within that country fair  
Lived on, nor from their memories drave  
The thought of what they could not have.  
And without need tormented still

Each other with some bitter ill ;  
Yea, and themselves too, growing grey  
With dread of some long-lingering day,  
That never came ere they were dead  
With green sods growing on the head ;  
Nowise content with what they had,  
But falling still from good to bad  
While hard they sought the hopeless best  
And seldom happy or at rest  
Until at last with lessening blood  
One foot within the grave they stood.

Now so it chanced that in this land  
There did a certain castle stand,  
Set all alone deep in the hills,  
Amid the sound of falling rills  
Within a valley of sweet grass,  
To which there went one narrow pass  
Through the dark hills, but seldom trod.  
Rarely did horse-hoof press the sod  
About the quiet weedy moat,  
Where unscares did the great fish float ;  
Because men dreaded there to see  
The uncouth things of faërie ;  
Nathless by some few fathers old  
These tales about the place were told  
That neither squire nor seneschal  
Or varlet came in bower or hall,  
Yet all things were in order due,

Hangings of gold and red and blue,  
And tables with fair service set ;  
Cups that had paid the Cæsar's debt  
Could he have laid his hands on them ;  
Dorsars, with pearls in every hem,  
And fair embroidered gold-wrought things,  
Fit for a company of kings ;  
And in the chambers dainty beds,  
With pillows dight for fair young heads ;  
And horses in the stables were,  
And in the cellars wine full clear  
And strong, and casks of ale and mead ;  
Yea, all things a great lord could need.

For whom these things were ready there  
None knew ; but if one chanced to fare  
Into that place at Easter-tide,  
There would he find a falcon tied  
Unto a pillar of the Hall ;  
And such a fate to him would fall,  
That if unto the seventh night,  
He watched the bird from dark to light,  
And light to dark unceasingly,  
On the last evening he should see  
A lady beautiful past words ;  
Then, were he come of clowns or lords,  
Son of a swineherd or a king,  
There must she grant him anything  
Perforce, that he might dare to ask,  
And do his very hardest task



But if he slumbered, ne'er again  
The wretch would wake for he was slain  
Helpless, by hands he could not see,  
And torn and mangled wretchedly.

Now said these elders—Ere this tide  
Full many folk this thing have tried,  
But few have got much good thereby;  
For first, a many came to die  
By slumbering ere their watch was done;  
Or else they saw that lovely one,  
And mazed, they knew not what to say;  
Or asked some toy for all their pay,  
That easily they might have won,  
Nor staked their lives and souls thereon;  
Or asking, asked for some great thing  
That was their bane; as to be king  
One asked, and died the morrow morn  
That he was crowned, of all forlorn.

Yet thither came a certain man,  
Who from being poor great riches wan  
Past telling, whose grandsons now are  
Great lords thereby in peace and war.  
And in their coat-of-arms they bear,  
Upon a field of azure fair,  
A castle and a falcon, set  
Below a chief of golden fret.

And in our day a certain knight  
Prayed to be worsted in no fight,

And so it happed to him : yet he  
Died none the less most wretchedly,  
And all his prowess was in vain,  
For by a losel was he slain,  
As on the highway side he slept  
One summer night, of no man kept.

Such tales as these the fathers old  
About that lonely castle told ;  
And in their day the King must try  
Himself to prove that mystery,  
Although, unless the fay could give  
For ever on the earth to live,  
Nought could he ask that he had not :  
For boundless riches had he got,  
Fair children, and a faithful wife ;  
And happily had passed his life,  
And all fulfilled of victory,  
Yet was he fain this thing to see.

So towards the mountains he set out  
One noontide, with a gallant rout  
Of knights and lords, and as the day  
Began to fail came to the way  
Where he must enter all alone,  
Between the dreary walls of stone.  
Thereon to that fair company  
He bade farewell, who wistfully  
Looked backward oft as home they rode.  
But in the entry he abode

Of that rough unknown narrowing pass,  
Where twilight at the high noon was.

Then onward he began to ride :  
Smooth rose the rocks on every side,  
And seemed as they were cut by man ;  
Adown them ever water ran,  
But they of living things were bare,  
Yea, not a blade of grass grew there ;  
And underfoot rough was the way,  
For scattered all about there lay  
Great jagged pieces of black stone.  
Throughout the pass the wind did moan,  
With such wild noises, that the King  
Could almost think he heard something  
Spoken of men ; as one might hear  
The voices of folk standing near  
One's chamber wall : yet saw he nought  
Except those high walls strangely wrought,  
And overhead the strip of sky.

So, going onward painfully,  
He met therein no evil thing,  
But came about the sun-setting  
Unto the opening of the pass,  
And thence beheld a vale of grass  
Bright with the yellow daffodil ;  
And all the vale the sun did fill  
With his last glory. Midmost there  
Rose up a stronghold, built four-square,  
Upon a flowery grassy mound,

That moat and high wall ran around.

Thereby he saw a walled pleasance,  
With walks and sward fit for the dance  
Of Arthur's court in its best time,  
That seemed to feel some magic clime ;  
For though through all the vale outside  
Things were as in the April-tide,  
And daffodils and cowslips grew  
And hidden the March violets blew,  
Within the bounds of that sweet close  
Was trellised the bewildering rose ;  
There was the lily over-sweet,  
And starry pinks for garlands meet ;  
And apricots hung on the wall  
And midst the flowers did peaches fall,  
And nought had blemish there or spot.  
For in that place decay was not.

Silent awhile the King abode  
Beholding all, then on he rode  
And to the castle-gate drew nigh,  
'Till fell the drawbridge silently,  
And when across it he did ride  
He found the great gates open wide,  
And entered there, but as he passed  
The gates were shut behind him fast,  
But not before that he could see  
The drawbridge rise up silently.

'Then round he gazed oppressed with awe,

And there no living thing he saw  
Except the sparrows in the eaves,  
As restless as light autumn leaves  
Blown by the fitful rainy wind.  
Thereon his final goal to find,  
He lighted off his war-horse good  
And let him wander as he would,  
When he had eased him of his gear ;  
Then gathering heart against his fear.  
Just at the silent end of day  
Through the fair porch he took his way  
And found at last a goodly hall  
With glorious hangings on the wall,  
Inwrought with trees of every clime,  
And stories of the ancient time,  
But all of sorcery they were.  
For o'er the daïs Venus fair,  
Fluttered about by many a dove,  
Made hopeless men for hopeless love,  
Both sick and sorry ; there they stood  
Wrought wonderfully in various mood,  
But wasted all by that hid fire  
Of measureless o'er-sweet desire,  
And let the hurrying world go by  
Forgetting all felicity.  
But down the hall the tale was wrought  
How Argo in old time was brought  
To Colchis for the fleece of gold.  
And on the other side was told

How mariners for long years came  
 To Circe, winning grief and shame.  
 Until at last by hardihead  
 And craft, Ulysses won her bed.

Long upon these the King did look  
 And of them all good heed he took ;  
 To see if they would tell him aught  
 About the matter that he sought,  
 But all were of the times long past ;  
 So going all about, at last  
 When grown nigh weary of his search  
 A falcon on a silver perch,  
 Anigh the dais did he see,  
 And wondered, because certainly  
 At his first coming 'twas not there ;  
 But 'neath the bird a scroll most fair,  
 With golden letters on the white  
 He saw, and in the dim twilight  
 By diligence could he read this :—

*“ Ye who have not enow of bliss,  
 And in this hard world labour sore,  
 By manhood here may get you more,  
 And be fulfilled of everything,  
 Till ye be masters of the King.*

*And yet, since I who promise this  
 Am nowise God to give man bliss  
 Past ending, now in time beware,  
 And if you live in little care*

*Then turn aback and home again,  
Lest unknown woe ye chance to gain  
In wishing for a thing untried."*

A little while did he abide,  
When he had read this, deep in thought,  
Wondering indeed if there were aught  
He had not got, that a wise man  
Would wish ; yet in his mind it ran  
That he might win a boundless realm,  
Yea, come to wear upon his helm  
The crown of the whole conquered earth ;  
That all who lived thereon, from birth  
To death should call him King and Lord,  
And great kings tremble at his word,  
Until in turn he came to die.  
Therewith a little did he sigh,  
But thought, " Of Alexander yet  
Men talk, nor would they e'er forget  
My name, if this should come to be,  
Whoever should come after me :  
But while I lay wrapped round with gold  
Should tales and histories manifold  
Be written of me, false and true ;  
And as the time still onward drew  
Almost a god would folk count me,  
Saying, ' In our time none such be.' "  
But therewith did he sigh again,  
And said, " Ah, vain, and worse than vain !

For though the world forget me nought,  
Yet by that time should I be brought  
Where all the world I should forget,  
And bitterly should I regret  
That I, from godlike great renown,  
To helpless death must fall adown :  
How could I bear to leave it all ?”

Then straight upon his mind did fall  
Thoughts of old longings half forgot,  
Matters for which his heart was hot  
A while ago : whereof no more  
He cared for some, and some right sore  
Had vexed him, being fulfilled at last.  
And when the thought of these had passed  
Still something was there left behind,  
That by no torturing of his mind  
Could he in any language name,  
Or into form of wishing frame.

At last he thought, “ What matters it,  
Before these seven days shall flit  
Some great thing surely shall I find,  
That gained will not leave grief behind,  
Nor turn to deadly injury.  
So now will I let these things be  
And think of some unknown delight.”

Now, therewithal, was come the night  
And thus his watch was well begun :



And till the rising of the sun,  
Waking, he paced about the hall,  
And saw the hangings on the wall  
Fade into nought, and then grow white  
In patches by the pale moonlight,  
And then again fade utterly  
As still the moonbeams passed them by ;  
Then in a while, with hope of day,  
Begin a little to grow grey,  
Until familiar things they grew,  
As up at last the great sun drew,  
And lit them with his yellow light  
At ending of another night.

Then right glad was he of the day,  
That passed with him in such-like way ;  
For neither man nor beast came near,  
Nor any voices did he hear.  
And when again it drew to night  
Silent it passed, till first twilight  
Of morning came, and then he heard  
The feeble twittering of some bird,  
That, in that utter silence drear,  
Smote harsh and startling on his ear.

Therewith came on that lonely day  
That passed him in no other way ;  
And thus six days and nights went by  
And nothing strange had come anigh.

And on that day he well-nigh deemed  
That all that story had been dreamed.

Daylight and dark, and night and day,  
Passed ever in their wonted way ;  
The wind played in the trees outside,  
The rooks from out the high trees cried ;  
And all seemed natural, frank, and fair,  
With little signs of magic there.  
Yet neither could he quite forget  
That close with summer blossoms set,  
And fruit hung on trees blossoming,  
When all about was early spring.  
Yea, if all this by man were made,  
Strange was it that yet undecayed  
The food lay on the tables still  
Unchanged by man, that wine did fill  
The golden cups, yet bright and red.  
And all was so apparelléd  
For guests that came not, yet was all  
As though that servants filled the hall.  
So waxed and waned his hopes, and still  
He formed no wish for good or ill.  
And while he thought of this and that  
Upon his perch the falcon sat  
Unfed, unhooded, his bright eyes  
Beholders of the hard-earned prize,  
Glancing around him restlessly,  
As though he knew the time drew nigh  
When this long watching should be done.

So little by little fell the sun,

From high noon unto sun-setting ;  
And in that lapse of time the King,  
Though still he woke, yet none the less  
Was dreaming in his sleeplessness  
Of this and that which he had done  
Before this watch he had begun ;  
Till, with a start, he looked at last  
About him, and all dreams were past ;  
For now, though it was past twilight  
Without, within all grew as bright  
• As when the noon-sun smote the wall,  
Though no lamp shone within the hall.

Then rose the King upon his feet,  
And well-nigh heard his own heart beat,  
And grew all pale for hope and fear.  
As sound of footsteps caught his ear  
But soft, and as some fair lady,  
Going as gently as might be,  
Stopped now and then awhile, distraught  
By pleasant wanderings of sweet thought.

Nigher the sound came, and more nigh,  
Until the King unwittingly  
Trembled, and felt his hair arise,  
But on the door still kept his eyes.  
That opened soon, and in the light  
There stepped alone a lady bright,  
And made straight toward him up the hall.

In golden garments was she clad  
And round her waist a belt she had

Of emeralds fair, and from her feet,  
That shod with gold the floor did meet,  
She held the raiment daintily,  
And on her golden head had she  
A rose-wreath round a pearl-wrought crown,  
Softly she walked with eyes cast down,  
Nor looked she any other than  
An earthly lady, though no man  
Has seen so fair a thing as she.

So when her face the King could see  
Still more he trembled, and he thought,  
"Surely my wish is hither brought,  
And this will be a goodly day  
If for mine own I win this may."  
And therewithal she drew anear  
Until the trembling King could hear  
Her very breathing, and she raised  
Her head and on the King's face gazed  
With serious eyes, and stopping there,  
Swept from her shoulders her long hair,  
And let her gown fall on her feet,  
Then spoke in a clear voice and sweet :

"Well hast thou watched, so now, O King,  
Be bold, and wish for some good thing ;  
And yet, I counsel thee, be wise.  
Behold, spite of these lips and eyes,  
Hundreds of years old now am I  
And have seen joy and misery.  
And thou, who yet hast lived in bliss.

I bid thee well consider this ;  
Better it were that men should live  
As beasts, and take what earth can give,  
The air, the warm sun and the grass  
Until unto the earth they pass,  
And gain perchance nought worse than rest  
Than that not knowing what is best  
For sons of men, they needs must thirst  
For what shall make their lives accurst.

“Therefore I bid thee now beware,  
Lest getting something seeming fair,  
Thou com'st in vain to long for more  
Or lest the thing thou wishest for  
Make thee unhappy till thou diest,  
Or lest with speedy death thou buyest  
A little hour of happiness  
Or lazy joy with sharp distress.

“Alas, why say I this to thee,  
For now I see full certainly,  
That thou wilt ask for such a thing,  
It had been best for thee to fling  
Thy body from a mountain-top,  
Or in a white hot fire to drop,  
Or ever thou hadst seen me here,  
Nay then be speedy and speak clear.”

Then the King cried out eagerly,  
Grown fearless, “Ah, be kind to me !  
Thou knowest what I long for then !  
Thou know'st that I, a king of men,

Will ask for nothing else than thee !  
Thou didst not say this could not be,  
And I have had enough of bliss,  
If I may end my life with this."

"Hearken," she said, "what men will say  
When they are mad ; before to-day  
I knew that words such things could mean,  
And wondered that it could have been.

"Think well, because this wished-for joy,  
That surely will thy bliss destroy,  
Will let thee live, until thy life  
Is wrapped in such bewildering strife  
That all thy days will seem but ill—  
Now wilt thou wish for this thing still?"

"Wilt thou then grant it?" cried the King ;  
"Surely thou art an earthly thing,  
And all this is but mockery,  
And thou canst tell no more than I  
What ending to my life shall be."

"Nay, then," she said, "I grant it thee  
Perforce ; come nigh, for I am thine  
Until the morning sun doth shine,  
And only coming time can prove  
What thing I am."

Dizzy with love,  
And with surprise struck motionless  
That this divine thing, with far less  
Of striving than a village maid,  
Had yielded, there he stood afraid,

Spite of hot words and passionate,  
And strove to think upon his fate.

But as he stood there, presently  
With smiling face she drew anigh,  
And on his face he felt her breath.  
“O love,” she said, “dost thou fear death?  
Not till next morning shalt thou die,  
Or fall into thy misery.”  
Then on his hand her hand did fall,  
And forth she led him down the hall,  
Going full softly by his side.

“O love,” she said, “now well betide  
The day whereon thou cam’st to me.  
I would this night a year might be,  
Yea, life-long; such life as we have,  
A thousand years from womb to grave.”

And then that clinging hand seemed worth  
Whatever joy was left on earth,  
And every trouble he forgot,  
And time and death remembered not:  
Kinder she grew, she clung to him  
With loving arms, her eyes did swim  
With love and pity, as he strove  
To show the wisdom of his love;  
With trembling lips she praised his choice,  
And said, “Ah, well may’st thou rejoice,

Well may'st thou think this one short night  
Worth years of other men's delight.  
If thy heart as mine own heart is,  
Sunk in a boundless sea of bliss ;  
O love, rejoice with me ! rejoice !"

But as she spoke, her honied voice  
Trembled, and midst of sobs she said,  
" O love, and art thou still afraid ?  
Return, then, to thine happiness,  
Nor will I love thee any less ;  
But watch thee as a mother might  
Her child at play."

With strange delight  
He stammered out, " Nay, keep thy tears  
For me, and for my ruined years  
Weep love, that I may love thee more,  
My little hour will soon be o'er."

" Ah, love," she said, " and thou art wise  
As men are, with long miseries  
Buying these idle words and vain,  
My foolish love, with lasting pain ;  
And yet, thou wouldst have died at last  
If in all wisdom thou hadst passed  
Thy weary life : forgive me then,  
In pitying the sad life of men."

Then in such bliss his soul did swim,  
But tender music unto him  
Her words were ; death and misery  
But empty names were grown to be,



As from that place his steps she drew,  
And dark the hall behind them grew.

BUT end comes to all earthly bliss,  
And by his choice full short was his ;  
And in the morning, grey and cold,  
Beside the daïs did she hold  
His trembling hand, and wistfully  
He, doubting what his fate should be,  
Gazed at her solemn eyes, that now,  
Beneath her calm, untroubled brow,  
Were fixed on his wild face and wan ;  
At last she said, " Oh, hapless man,  
Depart ! thy full wish hast thou had ;  
A little time thou hast been glad,  
Thou shalt be sorry till thou die.

" And though, indeed, full fain am I  
This might not be ; nathless, as day  
Night follows, colourless and grey,  
So this shall follow thy delight,  
Your joy hath ending with last night—  
Nay, peace, and hearken to thy fate.

" Strife without peace, early and late,  
Lasting long after thou art dead,  
And laid with earth upon thine head ;  
War without victory shalt thou have,

Defeat, nor honour shalt thou save ;  
 Thy fair land shall be rent and torn,  
 Thy people be of all forlorn,  
 And all men curse thee for this thing."

She loosed his hand, but yet the King  
 Said, "Yea, and I may go with thee?  
 Why should we part? then let things be  
 E'en as they will!" "Poor man," she said,  
 "Thou ravest; our hot love is dead,  
 If ever it had any life :  
 Go, make thee ready for the strife  
 Wherein thy days shall soon be wrapped ;  
 And of the things that here have happed  
 Make thou such joy as thou may'st do ;  
 But I from this place needs must go,  
 Nor shalt thou ever see me more  
 Until thy troubled life is o'er :  
 Alas ! to say 'farewell' to thee  
 Were nought but bitter mockery.  
 Fare as thou may'st, and with good heart  
 Play to the end thy wretched part."

Therewith she turned and went from him,  
 And with such pain his eyes did swim  
 He scarce could see her leave the place ;  
 And then, with troubled and pale face,  
 He gat him thence : and soon he found  
 His good horse in the base-court bound ;  
 So, loosing him, forth did he ride,

For the great gates were open wide,  
And flat the heavy drawbridge lay.

So by the middle of the day,  
That murky pass had he gone through,  
And come to country that he knew ;  
And homeward turned his horse's head,  
And passing village and homestead  
Nigh to his palace came at last ;  
And still the further that he passed  
From that strange castle of the fays,  
More dreamlike seemed those seven days,  
And dreamlike the delicious night ;  
And like a dream the shoulders white,  
And clinging arms and yellow hair,  
And dreamlike the sad morning there.  
Until at last he 'gan to deem  
That all might well have been a dream—  
Yet why was life a weariness ?  
What meant this sting of sharp distress ?  
This longing for a hopeless love,  
No sighing from his heart could move ?

Or else, 'She did not come and go  
As fays might do, but soft and slow  
Her lovely feet fell on the floor ;  
She set her fair hand to the door  
As any dainty maid might do ;  
And though, indeed, there are but few

Beneath the sun as fair as she,  
She seemed a fleshly thing to be.  
Perchance a merry mock this is,  
And I may some day have the bliss  
To see her lovely face again,  
As smiling she makes all things plain.  
And then as I am still a king,  
With me may she make tarrying  
Full long, yea, till I come to die."

Therewith at last being come anigh  
Unto his very palace gate,  
He saw his knights and squires wait  
His coming, therefore on the ground  
He lighted, and they flocked around  
Till he should tell them of his fare.  
Then mocking said he, "Ye may dare,  
The worst man of you all, to go  
And watch as I was bold to do ;  
For nought I heard except the wind,  
And nought I saw to call to mind."  
So said he, but they noted well  
That something more he had to tell  
If it had pleased him ; one old man,  
Beholding his changed face and wan,  
Muttered, "Would God it might be so !  
Alas ! I fear what fate may do ;  
Too much good fortune hast thou had  
By anything to be more glad  
Than thou hast been, I fear thee then

Lest thou becom'st a curse to men."  
But to his place the doomed King passed,  
And all remembrance strove to cast  
From out his mind of that past day,  
And spent his life in sport and play.

GREAT among other kings, I said  
He was before he first was led  
Unto that castle of the fays,  
But soon he lost his happy days  
And all his goodly life was done.

And first indeed his best-loved son,  
The very apple of his eye,  
Waged war against him bitterly ;  
And when this son was overcome  
And taken, and folk led him home,  
And him the King had gone to meet,  
Meaning with gentle words and sweet  
To win him to his love again,  
By his own hand he found him slain.

I know not if the doomed King yet  
Remembered the fay lady's threat,  
But troubles upon troubles came :  
His daughter next was brought to shame,  
Who unto all eyes seemed to be  
The image of all purity,

And fleeing from the royal place  
The King no more beheld her face.  
Then next a folk that came from far  
Sent to the King great threats of war,  
But he, full-fed of victory,  
Deemed this a little thing to be,  
And thought the troubles of his home  
Thereby he well might overcome  
Amid the hurry of the fight.

His foemen seemed of little might,  
Although they thronged like summer bees  
About the outlying villages,  
And on the land great ruin brought.  
Well, he this barbarous people sought  
With such an army as seemed meet  
To put the world beneath his feet ;  
The day of battle came, and he,  
Flushed with the hope of victory,  
Grew happy, as he had not been  
Since he those glorious eyes had seen.

They met,—his solid ranks of steel  
There scarcely more the darts could feel  
Of those new foemen, than if they  
Had been a hundred miles away :—  
They met,—a storied folk were his  
To whom sharp war had long been bliss,  
A thousand years of memories  
Were flashing in their shielded eyes ;  
And grave philosophers they had

To bid them ever to be glad  
To meet their death and get life done  
Midst glorious deeds from sire to son.

And those they met were beasts, or worse,  
To whom life seemed a jest, a curse ;  
Of fame and name they had not heard ;  
Honour to them was but a word,  
A word spoke in another tongue ;  
No memories round their banners clung,  
No walls they knew, no art of war,  
By hunger were they driven afar  
Unto the place whereon they stood,  
Ravening for bestial joys and blood.

No wonder if these barbarous men  
Were slain by hundreds to each ten  
Of the King's brave well-armoured folk,  
No wonder if their charges broke  
To nothing, on the walls of steel,  
And back the baffled hordes must reel.  
So stood throughout a summer day  
Scarce touched the King's most fair array,  
Yet as it drew to even-tide  
The foe still surged on every side,  
As hopeless hunger-bitten men,  
About his folk grown wearied then.

Therewith the King beheld that crowd  
Howling and dusk, and cried aloud,  
" What do ye, warriors ? and how long

Shall weak folk hold in check the strong?  
Nay, forward banners ! end the day  
And show these folk how brave men play.”  
The young knights shouted at his word,  
But the old folk in terror heard  
The shouting run adown the line,  
And saw men flush as if with wine—  
“O Sire,” they said, “the day is sure,  
Nor will these folk the night endure  
Beset with misery and fears.”  
Alas ! they spoke to heedless ears ;  
For scarce one look on them he cast  
But forward through the ranks he passed,  
And cried out, “Who will follow me  
To win a fruitful victory?”  
And toward the foe in haste he spurred,  
And at his back their shouts he heard,  
Such shouts as he ne’er heard again.

They met—ere moonrise all the plain  
Was filled by men in hurrying flight  
The relics of that shameful fight ;  
The close array, the full-armed men,  
The ancient fame availed not then,  
The dark night only was a friend  
To bring that slaughter to an end ;  
And surely there the King had died,  
But driven by that back-rushing tide  
Against his will he needs must flee ;



And as he pondered bitterly  
On all that wreck that he had wrought,  
From time to time indeed he thought  
Of the fay woman's dreadful threat.

“ But everything was not lost yet ;  
Next day he said, great was the rout  
And shameful beyond any doubt,  
But since indeed at eventide  
The flight began, not many died,  
And gathering all the stragglers now  
His troops still made a gallant show—  
Alas ! it was a show indeed ;  
Himself desponding, did he lead  
His beaten men against the foe,  
Thinking at least to lie alow  
Before the final rout should be  
But scarce upon the enemy  
Could these, whose shaken banners shook  
The frightened world, now dare to look ;  
Nor yet could the doomed King die there  
A death he once had held most fair ;  
Amid unwounded men he came  
Back to his city, bent with shame,  
Unkingly, midst his great distress,  
Yea, weeping at the bitterness  
Of women's curses that did greet  
His passage down the troubled street.  
But sight of all the things they loved,

The memory of their manhood moved  
Within the folk, and aged men  
And boys must think of battle then,  
And men that had not seen the foe  
Must clamour to the war to go. .  
So a great army poured once more  
From out the city, and before  
The very gates they fought again,  
But their late valour was in vain ;  
They died indeed, and that was good,  
But nought they gained for all the blood  
Poured out like water ; for the foe,  
Men might have stayed a while ago,  
A match for very gods were grown,  
So like the field in June-tide mown  
The King's men fell, and but in vain  
The remnant strove the town to gain ;  
Whose battlements were nought to stay  
An untaught foe upon that day,  
Though many a tale the annals told  
Of sieges in the days of old,  
When all the world then knew of war  
From that fair place was driven afar.

As for the King, a charmed life  
He seemed to bear ; from out that strife  
He came unhurt, and he could see,  
As down the valley he did flee  
With his most wretched company,

His palace flaming to the sky.  
Then in the very midst of woe  
His yearning thoughts would backward go  
Unto the castle of the fay ;  
He muttered, " Shall I curse that day,  
The last delight that I have had,  
For certainly I then was glad ?  
And who knows if what men call bliss  
Had been much better now than this  
When I am hastening to the end."

That fearful rest, that dreaded friend,  
That Death, he did not gain as yet ;  
A band of men he soon did get,  
A ruined rout of bad and good,  
With whom within the tangled wood,  
The rugged mountain, he abode,  
And thenceforth oftentimes they rode  
Into the fair land once called his,  
And yet but little came of this,  
Except more woe for Heaven to see  
Some little added misery  
Unto that miserable realm :  
The barbarous foe did overwhelm  
The cities and the fertile plain,  
And many a peaceful man was slain,  
And many a maiden brought to shame.  
And yielded towns were set aflame ;  
For all the land was masterless.

Long dwelt the King in great distress,

From wood to mountain ever tost,  
Mourning for all that he had lost,  
Until it chanced upon a day,  
Asleep in early morn he lay,  
And in a vision there did see  
Clad all in black, that fay lady  
Whereby all this had come to pass,  
But dim as in a misty glass :  
She said, "I come thy death to tell  
Yet now to thee may say 'farewell,'  
For in a short space wilt thou be  
Within an endless dim country  
Where thou may'st well win woe or bliss."  
Therewith she stooped his lips to kiss  
And vanished straightway from his sight,  
So waking there he sat upright  
And looked around, but nought could see  
And heard but song-birds' melody,  
For that was the first break of day.

Then with a sigh adown he lay  
And slept, nor ever woke again,  
For in that hour was he slain  
By stealthy traitors as he slept.  
He of a few was much bewept,  
But of most men was well forgot  
While the town's ashes still were hot  
The foeman on that day did burn.

As for the land, great Time did turn  
The bloody fields to deep green grass,  
And from the minds of men did pass  
The memory of that time of woe,  
And at this day all things are so  
As first I said ; a land it is  
Where men may dwell in rest and bliss  
If so they will—Who yet will not,  
Because their hasty hearts are hot  
With foolish hate, and longing vain  
The sire and dam of grief and pain.

NEATH the bright sky cool grew the weary earth,  
And many a bud in that fair hour had birth  
Upon the garden bushes ; in the west  
The sky got ready for the great sun's rest,  
And all was fresh and lovely ; none the less  
Although those old men shared the happiness  
Of the bright eve, 'twas mixed with memories  
Of how they might in old times have been wise,  
Not casting by for very wilfulness  
What wealth might come their changing life to bless ;  
Lulling their hearts to sleep, amid the cold  
Of bitter times, that so they might behold  
Some joy at last, e'en if it lingered long.  
That, wearing not their souls with grief and wrong,  
They still might watch the changing world go by,  
Content to live, content at last to die.

Alas ! if they had reached content at last.  
It was perforce when all their strength was past ;  
And after loss of many days once bright,  
With foolish hopes of unattained delight.

## AUGUST.

A CROSS the gap made by our English hinds,  
Amidst the Roman's handiwork, behold  
Far off the long-roofed church ; the shepherd binds  
The withy round the hurdles of his fold ;  
Down in the foss the river fed of old,  
That through long lapse of time has grown to be  
The little grassy valley that you see.

Rest here awhile, not yet the eve is still,  
The bees are wandering yet, and you may hear  
The barley mowers on the trenchéd hill,  
The sheep-bells, and the restless changing weir,  
All little sounds made musical and clear  
Beneath the sky that burning August gives,  
While yet the thought of glorious Summer lives.

Ah, love ! such happy days, such days as these,  
Must we still waste them, craving for the best,  
Like lovers o'er the painted images  
Of those who once their yearning hearts have blessed ?  
Have we been happy on our day of rest ?  
Thine eyes say "yes,"—but if it came again,  
Perchance its ending would not seem so vain.

NOW came fulfilment of the year's desire,  
The tall wheat, coloured by the August fire  
Grew heavy-headed, dreading its decay,  
And blacker grew the elm-trees day by day.  
About the edges of the yellow corn,  
And o'er the gardens grown somewhat outworn  
The bees went hurrying to fill up their store ;  
The apple-boughs bent over more and more ;  
With peach and apricot the garden wall,  
Was odorous, and the pears began to fall  
From off the high tree with each freshening breeze.

So in a house bordered about with trees,  
A little raised above the waving gold  
The Wanderers heard this marvellous story told,  
While 'twixt the gleaming flasks of ancient wine,  
They watched the reapers' slow advancing line.



## PYGMALION AND THE IMAGE.

## ARGUMENT.

A MAN of Cyprus, a sculptor named Pygmalion, made an image of a woman, fairer than any that had yet been seen, and in the end came to love his own handiwork as though it had been alive : wherefore, praying to Venus for help, he obtained his end, for she made the image alive indeed, and a woman, and Pygmalion wedded her.

A T Amathus, that from the southern side  
Of Cyprus, looks across the Syrian sea,  
There did in ancient time a man abide  
Known to the island-dwellers, for that he  
Had wrought most godlike works in imagery,  
And day by day still greater honour won,  
Which man our old books call Pygmalion.

Yet in the praise of men small joy he had,  
But walked abroad with downcast brooding face,  
Nor yet by any damsel was made glad ;  
For, sooth to say, the women of that place  
Must seem to all men an accursed race,  
Who with the Turner of all Hearts once strove  
And now their hearts must carry lust for love.

Upon a day it chanced that he had been  
About the streets, and on the crowded quays,  
Rich with unopened wealth of bales, had seen  
The dark-eyed merchants of the southern seas  
In chaffer with the base Propoetides,  
And heavy-hearted gat him home again,  
His once-loved life grown idle, poor, and vain.

And there upon his images he cast  
His weary eyes, yet little noted them,  
As still from name to name his swift thought passed.  
For what to him was Juno's well-wrought hem,  
Diana's shaft, or Pallas' olive-stem?  
What help could Hermes' rod unto him give,  
Until with shadowy things he came to live?

Yet note, that though, while looking on the sun,  
The craftsman o'er his work some morn of spring  
May chide his useless labour never done,  
For all his murmurs, with no other thing  
He soothes his heart, and dulls thought's poisonous sting,  
And thus in thought's despite the world goes on;  
And so it was with this Pygmalion.

Unto the chisel must he set his hand,  
And slowly, still in troubled thought must pace,  
About a work begun, that there doth stand,  
And still returning to the self-same place,  
Unto the image now must set his face,

And with a sigh his wonted toil begin,  
Half-loathed, half-loved, a little rest to win.

The lessening marble that he worked upon,  
A woman's form now imaged doubtfully,  
And in such guise the work had he begun,  
Because when he the untouched block did see  
In wandering veins that form there seemed to be,  
Whereon he cried out in a careless mood,  
"O lady Venus, make this presage good !

"And then this block of stone shall be thy maid,  
And, not without rich golden ornament,  
Shall bide within thy quivering myrtle-shade."  
So spoke he, but the goddess, well content,  
Unto his hand such godlike mastery sent,  
That like the first artificer he wrought,  
Who made the gift that woe to all men brought.

And yet, but such as he was wont to do,  
At first indeed that work divine he deemed,  
And as the white chips from the chisel flew  
Of other matters languidly he dreamed,  
For easy to his hand that labour seemed,  
And he was stirred with many a troubling thought,  
And many a doubt perplexed him as he wrought.

And yet, again, at last there came a day  
When smother and more shapely grew the stone

And he, grown eager, put all thought away  
But that which touched his craftsmanship alone,  
And he would gaze at what his hands had done,  
Until his heart with boundless joy would swell  
That all was wrought so wonderfully well.

Yet long it was ere he was satisfied,  
And with the pride that by his mastery  
This thing was done, whose equal far and wide  
In no town of the world a man could see,  
Came burning longing that the work should be  
E'en better still, and to his heart there came  
A strange and strong desire he could not name.

The night seemed long, and long the twilight seemed,  
A vain thing seemed his flowery garden fair ;  
Though through the night still of his work he dreamed,  
And though his smooth-stemmed trees so nigh it were,  
That thence he could behold the marble hair ;  
Nought was enough, until with steel in hand  
He came before the wondrous stone to stand.

No song could charm him, and no histories  
Of men's misdoings could avail him now,  
Nay, scarcely seaward had he turned his eyes,  
If men had said, "The fierce Tyrrhenians row  
Up through the bay, rise up and strike a blow  
For life and goods ;" for nought to him seemed dear  
But to his well-loved work to be anear.

Then vexed he grew, and knowing not his heart,  
Unto himself he said, " Ah, what is this,  
That I who oft was happy to depart,  
And wander where the boughs each other kiss  
'Neath the west wind, now have no other bliss  
But in vain smoothing of this marble maid,  
Whose chips this month a drachma had outweighed ?

" Lo I will get me to the woods and try  
If I my woodcraft have forgotten quite,  
And then, returning, lay this folly by,  
And eat my fill, and sleep my sleep anight,  
And 'gin to carve a Hercules aright  
Upon the morrow, and perchance indeed  
The Theban will be good to me at need."

With that he took his quiver and his bow,  
And through the gates of Amathus he went,  
And toward the mountain slopes began to go,  
Within the woods to work out his intent.  
Fair was the day, the honied beanfield's scent  
The west wind bore unto him, o'er the way  
The glittering noisy poplar leaves did play.

All things were moving ; as his hurried feet  
Passed by, within the flowery swathe he heard  
The sweeping of the scythe, the swallow fleet  
Rose over him, the sitting partridge stirred  
On the field's edge ; the brown bee by him whirled,

Or murmured in the clover flowers below.  
But he with bowed-down head failed not to go.

At last he stopped, and, looking round, he said,  
“Like one whose thirtieth year is well gone by,  
The day is getting ready to be dead ;  
No rest, and on the border of the sky  
Already the great banks of dark haze lie ;  
No rest—what do I midst this stir and noise ?  
What part have I in these unthinking joys ?”

With that he turned, and toward the city-gate  
Through the sweet fields went swifter than he came,  
And cast his heart into the hands of fate ;  
Nor strove with it, when higher 'gan to flame  
That strange and strong desire without a name ;  
Till panting, thinking of nought else, once more  
His hand was on the latch of his own door.

One moment there he lingered, as he said,  
“Alas ! what should I do if she were gone ?”  
But even with that word his brow waxed red  
To hear his own lips name a thing of stone,  
As though the gods some marvel there had done,  
And made his work alive ; and therewithal  
In turn great pallor on his face did fall.

But with a sigh he passed into the house,  
Yet even then his chamber-door must hold,

And listen there, half blind and timorous,  
Until his heart should wax a little bold ;  
Then entering, motionless and white and cold,  
He saw the image stand amidst the floor  
All whitened now by labour done before.

Blinded with tears, his chisel up he caught,  
And, drawing near, and sighing, tenderly  
Upon the marvel of the face he wrought,  
E'en as he used to pass the long days by ;  
But his sighs changed to sobbing presently,  
And on the floor the useless steel he flung,  
And, weeping loud, about the image clung.

“ Alas ! ” he cried, “ why have I made thee then,  
That thus thou mockest me ? I know indeed  
That many such as thou are loved of men,  
Whose passionate eyes poor wretches still will lead  
Into their net, and smile to see them bleed ;  
But these the god's made, and this hand made thee  
Who wilt not speak one little word to me.”

Then from the image did he draw aback  
To gaze on it through tears : and you had said,  
Regarding it, that little did it lack  
To be a living and most lovely maid ;  
Naked it was, its unbound locks were laid  
Over the lovely shoulders ; with one hand  
Reached out, as to a lover, did it stand,

The other held a fair rose over-blown ;  
No smile was on the parted lips, the eyes  
Seemed as if even now great love had shown  
Unto them, something of its sweet surprise,  
Yet saddened them with half-seen mysteries,  
And still midst passion maiden-like she seemed,  
As though of love unchanged for aye she dreamed.

Reproachfully beholding all her grace,  
Pygmalion stood, until he grew dry-eyed,  
And then at last he turned away his face  
As if from her cold eyes his grief to hide ;  
And thus a weary while did he abide,  
With nothing in his heart but vain desire,  
The ever-burning, unconsuming fire.

But when again he turned his visage round  
His eyes were brighter and no more he wept,  
As if some little solace he had found,  
Although his folly none the more had slept,  
Rather some new-born god-sent madness kept  
His other madness from destroying him,  
And made the hope of death wax faint and dim ;

For, trembling and ashamed, from out the street  
Strong men he called, and faint with jealousy  
He caused them bear the ponderous, moveless feet  
Unto the chamber where he used to lie,  
So in a fair niche to his bed anigh,



Unwitting of his woe; they set it down,  
Then went their ways beneath his troubled frown.

Then to his treasury he went, and sought  
Fair gems for its adornment, but all there  
Seemed to his eager eyes but poor and nought,  
Not worthy e'en to touch her rippled hair.  
So he, departing, through the streets 'gan fare,  
And from the merchants at a mighty cost  
Bought gems that kings for no good deed had lost

These then he hung her senseless neck around,  
Set on her fingers, and fair arms of stone,  
Then cast himself before her on the ground,  
Praying for grace for all that he had done  
In leaving her untended and alone ;  
And still with every hour his madness grew  
Though all his folly in his heart he knew.

At last asleep before her feet he lay,  
Worn out with passion, yet this burning pain  
Returned on him, when with the light of day  
He woke and wept before her feet again ;  
Then of the fresh and new-born morning fain,  
Into his garden passed, and therefrom bore  
New spoil of flowers his love to lay before.

A little altar, with fine gold o'erlaid,  
Was in his house, that he a while ago

At some great man's command had deftly made,  
And this he now must take and set below  
Her well-wrought feet, and there must red flame glow  
About sweet wood, and he must send her thence  
The odour of Arabian frankincense.

Then as the smoke went up, he prayed and said,  
"Thou, image, hear'st me not, nor wilt thou speak,  
But I perchance shall know when I am dead,  
If this has been some goddess' sport, to seek  
A wretch, and in his heart infirm and weak  
To set her glorious image, so that he,  
Loving the form of immortality,

"May make much laughter for the gods above :  
Hear me, and if my love misliketh thee  
Then take my life away, for I will love  
Till death unfeared at last shall come to me,  
And give me rest, if he of might may be  
To slay the love of that which cannot die,  
The heavenly beauty that can ne'er pass by."

No word indeed the moveless image said,  
But with the sweet grave eyes his hands had wrought  
Still gazed down on his bowed imploring head,  
Yet his own words some solace to him brought,  
Gilding the net wherein his soul was caught  
With something like to hope, and all that day  
Some tender words he ever found to say ;

And still he felt as something heard him speak ,  
Sometimes he praised her beauty, and sometimes  
Reproached her in a feeble voice and weak,  
And at the last drew forth a book of rhymes,  
Wherein were writ the tales of many climes,  
And read aloud the sweetness hid therein  
Of lovers' sorrows and their tangled sin.

And when the sun went down, the frankincense  
Again upon the altar-flame he cast  
That through the open window floating thence  
O'er the fresh odours of the garden passed ;  
And so another day was gone at last,  
And he no more his love-lorn watch could keep,  
But now for utter weariness must sleep.

But in the night he dreamed that she was gone,  
And knowing that he dreamed, tried hard to wake  
And could not, but forsaken and alone  
He seemed to weep as though his heart would break,  
And when the night her sleepy veil did take  
From off the world, waking, his tears he found  
Still wet upon the pillow all around.

Then at the first, bewildered by those tears,  
He fell a-wondering wherefore he had wept,  
But suddenly remembering all his fears,  
Panting with terror, from the bed he leapt,  
But still its wonted place the image kept,

Nor moved for all the joyful ecstasy  
Wherewith he blessed the day that showed it nigh.

Then came the morning offering and the day,  
Midst flowers and words of love and kisses sweet  
From morn, through noon, to evening passed away,  
And scarce unhappy, crouching at her feet  
He saw the sun descend the sea to meet ;  
And scarce unhappy through the darkness crept  
Unto his bed, and midst soft dreaming slept.

**B**UT the next morn, e'en while the incense-smoke  
At sun-rising curled round about her head,  
Sweet sound of songs the wonted quiet broke  
Down in the street, and he by something led,  
He knew not what, must leave his prayer unsaid,  
And through the freshness of the morn must see  
The folk who went with that sweet minstrelsy ;

Damsels and youths in wonderful attire,  
And in their midst upon a car of gold  
An image of the Mother of Desire,  
Wrought by his hands in days that seemed grown old  
Though those sweet limbs a garment did enfold,  
Coloured like flame, enwrought with precious things,  
Most fit to be the prize of striving kings.

Then he remembered that the manner was  
That fair-clad priests the lovely Queen should take  
Thrice in the year, and through the city pass,  
And with sweet songs the dreaming folk awake ;  
And through the clouds a light there seemed to break  
When he remembered all the tales well told  
About her glorious kindly deeds of old.

So his unfinished prayer he finished not,  
But, kneeling, once more kissed the marble feet,  
And, while his heart with many thoughts waxed hot,  
He clad himself with fresh attire and meet  
For that bright service, and with blossoms sweet  
Entwined with tender leaves he crowned his head,  
And followed after as the goddess led.

But long and vain unto him seemed the way  
Until they came unto her house again ;  
Long years, the while they went about to lay  
The honey-hiding dwellers on the plain,  
The sweet companions of the yellowing grain  
Upon her golden altar ; long and long  
Before, at end of their delicious song,

They stripped her of her weed with reverend hands  
And showed the ivory limbs his hand had wrought ;  
Yea, and too long e'en then ere those fair bands,  
Dispersing here and there, the shadow sought  
Of Indian spice-trees o'er the warm sea brought

And toward the splashing of the fountain turned,  
Mocked the noon sun that o'er the cloisters burned.

But when the crowd of worshippers was gone  
And through the golden dimness of the place  
The goddess' very servants paced alone,  
Or some lone damsel murmured of her case  
Apart from prying eyes, he turned his face  
Unto that image made with toil and care,  
In days when unto him it seemed most fair.

Dusky and dim, though rich with gems and gold,  
The house of Venus was ; high in the dome  
The burning sun-light you could now behold,  
From nowhere else the light of day might come,  
To shame the Shame-faced Mother's lovely home ;  
A long way off the shrine, the fresh sea-breeze,  
Now just arising, brushed the myrtle-trees.

The torches of the flower-crowned, singing band  
Erewhile, indeed, made more than daylight there,  
Lighting the painted tales of many a land,  
And carven heroes, with their unused glare ;  
But now a few soft, glimmering lamps there were  
And on the altar a thin, flickering flame  
Just showed the golden letters of her name.

Blue in the dome yet hung the incense-cloud,  
And still its perfume lingered all around ;

And, trodden by the light-foot, fervent crowd,  
Thick lay the summer flowers upon the ground,  
And now from far-off halls uprose the sound  
Of Lydian music, and the dancer's cry,  
As though some door were opened suddenly.

So there he stood, some help from her to gain,  
Bewildered by that twilight midst of day ;  
Downcast with listening to the joyous strain  
He had no part in, hopeless with delay  
Of all the fair things he had meant to say ;  
Yet, as the incense on the flame he cast, [passed,—  
From stammering lips and pale these words there

“ O thou forgotten help, dost thou yet know  
What thing it is I need, when even I,  
Bent down before thee in this shame and woe,  
Can frame no set of words to tell thee why  
I needs must pray, O help me or I die !  
Or slay me, and in slaying take from me  
Even a dead man's feeble memory.

“ Say not thine help I have been slow to seek ;  
Here have I been from the first hour of morn,  
Who stand before thy presence faint and weak,  
Of my one poor delight left all forlorn ;  
Trembling with many fears, the hope outworn  
I had when first I left my love, my shame,  
To call upon thine oft-sung glorious name.”

He stopped to catch his breath, for as a sob  
Did each word leave his mouth ; but suddenly,  
Like a live thing, the thin flame 'gan to throb  
And gather force, and then shot up on high  
A steady spike of light, that drew anigh  
The sunbeam in the dome, then sank once more  
Into a feeble flicker as before.

But at that sight the nameless hope he had  
That kept him living midst unhappiness,  
Stirred in his breast, and with changed face and glad  
Unto the image forward must he press  
With words of praise his first word to redress,  
But then it was as though a thick black cloud  
Altar, and fire, and ivory limbs did shroud.

He staggered back, amazed and full of awe ,  
But when, with anxious eyes, he gazed around,  
About him still the worshippers he saw  
Sunk in their wonted works, with no surprise  
At what to him seemed awful mysteries ;  
Therewith he sighed and said, " This, too, I dream,  
No better day upon my life shall beam."

And yet for long upon the place he gazed  
Where other folk beheld the lovely Queen ;  
And while he looked the dusky veil seemed raised,  
And every thing was as it erst had been ;  
And then he said, " Such marvels I have seen



As some sick man may see from off his bed :  
Ah, I am sick, and would that I were dead !”

Therewith, not questioning his heart at all,  
He turned away and left the holy place,  
When now the wide sun reddened towards his fall,  
And a fresh west wind held the clouds in chase ;  
But coming out, at first he hid his face  
Dazed with the light, and in the porch he stood,  
Nor wished to move, or change his dreary mood.

Yet in a while the freshness of the eve  
Pierced to his weary heart, and with a sigh  
He raised his head, and slowly 'gan to leave  
The high carved pillars ; and so presently  
Had passed the grove of whispering myrtles by,  
And, mid the many noises of the street,  
Made himself brave the eyes of men to meet.

Thronged were the ways with folk in gay attire,  
Nursing the end of that festivity ;  
Girls fit to move the moody man's desire  
Brushed past him, and soft dainty minstrelsy  
He heard amid the laughter, and might see,  
Through open doors, the garden's green delight,  
Where pensive lovers waited for the night ;

Or resting dancers round the fountain drawn,  
With faces flushed unto the breeze turned round,

Or wandering o'er the fragrant trodden lawn,  
Took up their fallen garlands from the ground,  
Or languidly their scattered tresses bound,  
Or let their gathered raiment fall adown,  
With eyes downcast beneath their lovers' frown.

What hope Pygmalion yet might have, when he  
First left the pillars of the dreamy place,  
Amid such sights had vanished utterly.  
He turned his weary eyes from face to face,  
Nor noted them, as at a lagging pace  
He gat towards home, and still was murmuring,  
"Ah life, sweet life! the only godlike thing!"

And as he went, though longing to be there  
Whereas his sole desire awaited him,  
Yet did he loath to see the image fair,  
White and unchanged of face, unmoved of limb,  
And to his heart came dreamy thoughts and dim  
That unto some strange region he might come,  
Nor ever reach again his loveless home.

Yet soon, indeed, before his door he stood,  
And, as a man awaking from a dream,  
Seemed waked from his old folly; nought seemed good  
In all the things that he before had deemed  
At least worth life, and on his heart there streamed  
Cold light of day—he found himself alone,  
Reft of desire, all love and madness gone.

And yet for that past folly must he weep,  
As one might mourn the parted happiness  
That, mixed with madness, made him smile in sleep ;  
And still some lingering sweetness seemed to bless  
The hard life left of toil and loneliness,  
Like a past song too sweet, too short, and yet  
Emmeshed for ever in the memory's net.

Weeping he entered, murmuring, "O fair Queen,  
I thank thee that my prayer was not for nought,  
Truly a present helper hast thou been  
To those who faithfully thy throne have sought !  
Yet, since with pain deliverance I have bought,  
Hast thou not yet some gift in store for me,  
That I thine happy slave henceforth may be?"

THUS to his chamber at the last he came,  
And, pushing through the still half-opened door,  
He stood within ; but there, for very shame  
Of all the things that he had done before,  
Still kept his eyes bent down upon the floor,  
Thinking of all that he had done and said  
Since he had wrought that luckless marble maid

Yet soft his thoughts were, and the very place  
Seemed perfumed with some nameless heavenly air

So gaining courage, did he raise his face  
Unto the work his hands had made so fair,  
And cried aloud to see the niche all bare  
Of that sweet form, while through his heart again  
There shot a pang of his old yearning pain.

Yet while he stood, and knew not what to do  
With yearning, a strange thrill of hope there came,  
A shaft of new desire now pierced him through,  
And therewithal a soft voice called his name,  
And when he turned, with eager eyes aflame,  
He saw betwixt him and the setting sun  
The lively image of his loved one.

He trembled at the sight, for though her eyes,  
Her very lips, were such as he had made,  
And though her tresses fell but in such guise  
As he had wrought them, now was she arrayed  
In that fair garment that the priests had laid  
Upon the goddess on that very morn,  
Dyed like the setting sun upon the corn.

Speechless he stood, but she now drew anear,  
Simple and sweet as she was wont to be,  
And all at once her silver voice rang clear,  
Filling his soul with great felicity,  
And thus she spoke, "Pygmalion, come to me,  
O dear companion of my new-found life,  
For I am called thy lover and thy wife.

“Listen, these words the Dread One bade me say  
That was with me e'en now, *Pygmalion*,  
*My new-made soul I gve to thee to-day,*  
*Come, feel the sweet breath that thy prayer has won,*  
*And lay thine hand this heaving breast upon !*  
*Come love, and walk with me between the trees,*  
*And feel the freshness of the evening breeze.*

“*Sweep mine hair round thy neck ; behold my feet,*  
*The oft-kissed feet thou thoughtst should never move,*  
*Press down the daisies ! draw me to thee, sweet,*  
*And feel the warm heart of thy living love*  
*Beat against thine, and bless the Seed of Jove*  
*Whose loving tender heart hath wrought all this,*  
*And wrapped us both in such a cloud of bliss.*

“Ah, thou art wise to know what this may mean !  
Sweet seem the words to me, and needs must I  
Speak all the lesson of the lovely Queen :  
But this I know, I would we were more nigh,  
I have not heard thy voice but in the cry  
Thou utteredst then, when thou believedst gone  
The marvel of thine hands, the maid of stone.”

She reached her hand to him, and with kind eyes  
Gazed into his ; but he the fingers caught  
And drew her to him, and midst ecstasies  
Passing all words, yea, well-nigh passing thought,  
Felt that sweet breath that he so long had sought,

Felt the warm life within her heaving breast  
As in his arms his living love he pressed.

But as his cheek touched hers he heard her say,  
"Wilt thou not speak, O love? why dost thou weep?  
Art thou then sorry for this long-wished day,  
Or dost thou think perchance thou wilt not keep  
This that thou holdest, but in dreamy sleep?  
Nay, let us do the bidding of the Queen,  
And hand in hand walk through thy garden green ;

"Then shalt thou tell me, still beholding me,  
Full many things whereof I wish to know,  
And as we walk from whispering tree to tree  
Still more familiar to thee shall I grow,  
And such things shalt thou say unto me now  
As when thou deemedst thou wast quite alone,  
A madman, kneeling to a thing of stone."

But at that word a smile lit up his eyes  
And therewithal he spake some loving word,  
And she at first looked up in grave surprise  
When his deep voice and musical she heard,  
And clung to him as grown somewhat afeard ;  
Then cried aloud and said, "O mighty one!  
What joy with thee to look upon the sun."

Then into that fair garden did they pass  
And all the story of his love he told,

And as the twain went o'er the dewy grass,  
Beneath the risen moon could he behold  
The bright tears trickling down, then, waxen bold,  
He stopped and said, "Ah, love, what meaneth this?  
Seest thou how tears still follow earthly bliss?"

Then both her white arms round his neck she threw  
And sobbing said, "O love, what hurteth me?  
When first the sweetness of my life I knew,  
Not this I felt, but when I first saw thee  
A little pain and great felicity  
Rose up within me, and thy talk e'en now  
Made pain and pleasure ever greater grow?"

"O sweet," he said, "this thing is even love,  
Whereof I told thee; that all wise men fear,  
But yet escape not; nay, to gods above,  
Unless the old tales lie, it draweth near.  
But let my happy ears I pray thee hear  
Thy story too, and how thy blessed birth  
Has made a heaven of this once lonely earth."

"My sweet," she said, "as yet I am not wise,  
Or stored with words, aright the tale to tell,  
But listen: when I opened first mine eyes  
I stood within the niche thou knowest well,  
And from mine hand a heavy thing there fell  
Carved like these flowers, nor could I see things clear,  
And but a strange confused noise could hear.

“At last mine eyes could see a woman fair,  
But awful as this round white moon o’erhead,  
So that I trembled when I saw her there,  
For with my life was born some touch of dread,  
And therewithal I heard her voice that said,  
‘Come down, and learn to love and be alive,  
For thee, a well-prized gift, to-day I give.’

“Then on the floor I stepped, rejoicing much,  
Not knowing why, not knowing aught at all,  
Till she reached out her hand my breast to touch,  
And when her fingers thereupon did fall,  
Thought came unto my life, and therewithal  
I knew her for a goddess, and began  
To murmur in some tongue unknown to man.

“And then indeed not in this guise was I,  
No sandals had I, and no saffron gown,  
But naked as thou knowest utterly,  
E’en as my limbs beneath thine hand had grown,  
And this fair perfumed robe then fell adown  
Over the goddess’ feet and swept the ground,  
And round her loins a glittering belt was bound.

“But when the stammering of my tongue she heard  
Upon my trembling lips her hand she laid,  
And spoke again, ‘Nay, say not any word,  
All that thine heart would say I know unsaid,  
Who even now thine heart and voice have made ;



But listen rather, for thou knowest now  
What these words mean, and still wilt wiser grow

“ ‘Thy body, lifeless till I gave it life,  
A certain man, my servant, well hath wrought  
I give thee to him as his love and wife,  
With all thy dowry of desire and thought,  
Since this his yearning heart hath ever sought ;  
Now from my temple is he on the way,  
Deeming to find thee e’en as yesterday ;

“ ‘Bide thou his coming by the bed-head there,  
And when thou seest him set his eyes upon  
Thine empty niche, and hear’st him cry for care,  
Then call him by his name, Pygmalion,  
And certainly thy lover hast thou won ;  
But when he stands before thee silently,  
Say all these words that I shall teach to thee.’

“ With that she said what first I told thee, love  
And then went on, ‘Moreover thou shalt say  
That I, the daughter of almighty Jove,  
Have wrought for him this long-desired day ;  
In sign whereof, these things that pass away,  
Wherein mine image men have well arrayed,  
I give thee for thy wedding gear, O maid.’

“ Therewith her raiment she put off from her.  
And laid bare all her perfect loveliness,

And, smiling on me, came yet more anear,  
And on my mortal lips her lips did press,  
And said, 'Now herewith shalt thou love no less  
Than Psyche loved my son in days of old ;  
Farewell, of thee shall many a tale be told.'

"And even with that last word was she gone,  
How, I know not, and I my limbs arrayed  
In her fair gift, and waited thee alone—  
Ah, love, indeed the word is true she said,  
For now I love thee so, I grow afraid  
Of what the gods upon our heads may send—  
I love thee so, I think upon the end."

What words he said ? How can I tell again  
What words they said beneath the glimmering light,  
Some tongue they used unknown to loveless men  
As each to each they told their great delight,  
Until for stillness of the growing night  
Their soft sweet murmuring words seemed growing loud  
And dim the moon grew, hid by fleecy cloud.

SUCH was the ending of his ancient rhyme,  
That seemed to fit that soft and golden time,  
When men were happy, they could scarce tell why,  
Although they felt the rich year slipping by.  
The sun went down, the harvest-moon arose,  
And 'twixt the slim trees of that fruitful close  
They saw the corn still falling 'neath its light,  
While through the soft air of the windless night  
The voices of the reapers' mates rang clear  
In measured song, as of the fruitful year  
They told, and its delights, and now and then  
The rougher voices of the toiling men  
Joined in the song, as one by one released  
From that hard toil, they sauntered towards the feast  
That waited them upon the strip of grass  
That through the golden-glimmering sea did pass  
But those old men, glad to have lived so long,  
Sat listening through the twilight to the song,  
And when the night grew and all things were still  
Throughout the wide vale from green hill to hill  
Unto a happy harvesting they drank  
Till once more o'er the hills the white moon sank.

AUGUST had not gone by, though now was stored  
In the sweet-smelling granaries all the hoard  
Of golden corn ; the land had made her gain,  
And winter should howl round her doors in vain.  
But o'er the same fields grey now and forlorn  
The old men sat and heard the swineherd's horn,  
Far off across the stubble, when the day  
At end of harvest-tide was sad and grey ;  
And rain was in the wind's voice as it swept  
Along the hedges where the lone quail crept,  
Beneath the chattering of the restless pie.  
The fruit-hung branches moved, and suddenly  
The trembling apples smote the dewless grass,  
And all the year to autumn-tide did pass.  
E'en such a day it was as young men love  
When swiftly through the veins the blood doth move,  
And they, whose eyes can see not death at all,  
To thoughts of stirring deeds and pleasure fall,  
Because it seems to them to tell of life  
After the dreamy days devoid of strife,  
When every day with sunshine is begun,  
And cloudless skies receive the setting sun.

On such a day the older folk were fain  
Of something new somewhat to dull the pain  
Of sad, importunate old memories  
That to their weary hearts must needs arise.

Alas ! what new things on that day could come  
From hearts that now so long had been the home  
Of such dull thoughts, nay, rather let them tell  
Some tale that fits their ancient longings well.

Rolf was the speaker, who said, " Friends, behold  
This is e'en such a tale as those once told  
Unto my greedy ears by Nicholas,  
Before our quest for nothing came to pass."

## OGIER THE DANE.

### ARGUMENT.

WHEN Ogier was born, six fay ladies came to the cradle where he lay, and gave him various gifts, as to be brave and happy and the like ; but the sixth gave him to be her love when he should have lived long in the world : so Ogier grew up and became the greatest of knights, and at last, after many years, fell into the hands of that fay, and with her, as the story tells, he lives now, though he returned once to the world, as is shown in the process of this tale.

WITHIN some Danish city by the sea,  
 Whose name, changed now, is all unknown  
 to me,

Great mourning was there one fair summer eve,  
 Because the angels, bidden to receive  
 The fair Queen's lovely soul in Paradise,  
 Had done their bidding, and in royal guise  
 Her helpless body, once the prize of love,  
 Unable now for fear or hope to move,  
 Lay underneath the golden canopy ;  
 And bowed down by unkingly misery  
 The King sat by it, and not far away,

Within the chamber a fair man-child lay,  
His mother's bane, the king that was to be,  
Not witting yet of any royalty,  
Harmless and loved, although so new to life.

Calm the June evening was, no sign of strife  
The clear sky showed, no storm grew round the sun,  
Unhappy that his day of bliss was done ;  
Dumb was the sea, and if the beech-wood stirred,  
'Twas with the nestling of the grey-winged bird  
Midst its thick leaves ; and though the nightingale  
Her ancient, hapless sorrow must bewail,  
No more of woe there seemed within her song  
Than such as doth to lovers' words belong,  
Because their love is still unsatisfied.

But to the King, on that sweet eventide,  
No earth there seemed, no heaven when earth was gone ;  
No help, no God ! but lonely pain alone ;  
And he, midst unreal shadows, seemed to sit  
Himself the very heart and soul of it.  
But round the cradle of the new-born child  
The nurses now the weary time beguiled  
With stories of the just departed Queen ;  
And how, amid the heathen folk first seen,  
She had been won to love and godliness ;  
And as they spoke, e'en midst his dull distress,  
An eager whisper now and then did smite  
Upon the King's ear, of some past delight,  
Some once familiar name, and he would raise

His weary head, and on the speaker gaze  
Like one about to speak, but soon again  
Would drop his head and be alone with pain,  
Nor think of these ; who, silent in their turn,  
Would sit and watch the waxen tapers burn  
Amidst the dusk of the quick-gathering night,  
Until beneath the high stars' glimmering light,  
The fresh earth lay in colourless repose.

So passed the night, and now and then one rose  
From out her place to do what might avail  
To still the new-born infant's fretful wail ;  
Or through the softly-opened door there came  
Some nurse new waked, who, whispering low the name  
Of her whose turn was come, would take her place ;  
Then toward the King would turn about her face  
And to her fellows whisper of the day,  
And tell again of her just past away.

So waned the hours, the moon arose and grew,  
From off the sea a little west-wind blew,  
Rustling the garden-leaves like sudden rain ;  
And ere the moon began to fall again  
The wind grew cold, a change was in the sky,  
And in deep silence did the dawn draw nigh :  
Then from her place a nurse arose to light  
Fresh hallowed lights, for, dying with the night,  
The tapers round about the dead Queen were ;  
But the King raised his head and 'gan to stare  
Upon her, as her sweeping gown did glide



About the floor, that in the stillness cried  
Beneath her careful feet ; and now as she  
Had lit the second candle carefully,  
And on its silver spike another one  
Was setting, through her body did there run  
A sudden tremor, and the hand was stayed  
That on the dainty painted wax was laid ;  
Her eyelids fell down and she seemed to sleep,  
And o'er the staring King began to creep  
Sweet slumber too ; the bitter lines of woe  
That drew his weary face did softer grow,  
His eyelids dropped, his arms fell to his side ;  
And moveless in their places did abide  
The nursing women, held by some strong spell,  
E'en as they were, and utter silence fell  
Upon the mournful, glimmering chamber fair.

But now light footsteps coming up the stair,  
Smote on the deadly stillness, and the sound  
Of silken dresses trailing o'er the ground ;  
And heavenly odours through the chamber passed,  
Unlike the scents that rose and lily cast  
Upon the freshness of the dying night ;  
Then nigher drew the sound of footsteps light  
Until the door swung open noiselessly—  
A mass of sunlit flowers there seemed to be  
Within the doorway, and but pale and wan  
The flame showed now that serveth mortal man,  
As one by one six seeming ladies passed  
Into the room, and o'er its sorrow cast

That thoughtless sense of joy bewildering,  
That kisses youthful hearts amidst of spring ;  
Crowned were they, in such glorious raiment clad,  
As yet no merchant of the world has had  
Within his coffers ; yet those crowns seemed fair  
Only because they kissed their odorous hair,  
And all that flowery raiment was but blessed  
By those fair bodies that its splendour pressed.

Now to the cradle from that glorious band,  
A woman passed, and laid a tender hand  
Upon the babe, and gently drew aside  
The swathings soft that did his body hide ;  
And, seeing him so fair and great, she smiled,  
And stooped, and kissed him, saying, " O noble child,  
Have thou a gift from Gloriande this day ;  
For to the time when life shall pass away  
From this dear heart, no fear of death or shame,  
No weariness of good shall foul thy name."

So saying, to her sisters she returned ;  
And one came forth, upon whose brow there burned  
A crown of rubies, and whose heaving breast  
With happy rings a golden hauberk pressed ;  
She took the babe, and somewhat frowning said,  
" This gift I give, that till thy limbs are laid  
At rest for ever, to thine honoured life  
There never shall be lacking war and strife,  
That thou a long-enduring name mayst win,  
And by thy deeds, good pardon for thy sin."

With that another, who, unseen, meanwhile

Had drawn anigh, said with a joyous smile,  
“ And this forgotten gift to thee I give,  
That while amidst the turmoil thou dost live,  
Still shalt thou win the game, and unto thee  
Defeat and shame but idle words shall be.”

Then back they turned, and therewithal, the fourth  
Said, “ Take this gift for what it may be worth  
For that is mine to give ; lo, thou shalt be  
Gentle of speech, and in all courtesy  
The first of men : a little gift this is,  
After these promises of fame and bliss.”

Then toward the babe the fifth fair woman went ;  
Grey-eyed she was, and simple, with eyes bent  
Down on the floor, parted her red lips were,  
And o'er her sweet face marvellously fair  
Oft would the colour spread full suddenly ;  
Clad in a dainty gown and thin was she,  
For some green summer of the fay-land dight,  
Tripping she went, and laid her fingers light  
Upon the child, and said, “ O little one,  
As long as thou shalt look upon the sun  
Shall women long for thee ; take heed to this  
And give them what thou canst of love and bliss.”

Then, blushing for her words, therefrom she past,  
And by the cradle stood the sixth and last,  
The fairest of them all ; awhile she gazed  
Down on the child, and then her hand she raised,  
And made the one side of her bosom bare ;  
“ Ogier,” she said, “ if this be foul or fair

Thou know'st not now, but when thine earthly life  
Is drunk out to the dregs, and war and strife  
Have yielded thee whatever joy they may,  
Thine head upon this bosom shalt thou lay ;  
And then, despite of knowledge or of God,  
Will we be glad upon the flowery sod  
Within the happy country where I dwell :  
Ogier, my love that is to be, farewell !”

She turned, and even as they came they passed  
From out the place, and reached the gate at last  
That oped before their feet, and speedily  
They gained the edges of the murmuring sea,  
And as they stood in silence, gazing there  
Out to the west, they vanished into air,  
I know not how, nor whereto they returned.

But mixed with twilight in the chamber burned  
The flickering candles, and those dreary folk,  
Unlike to sleepers, from their trance awoke,  
But nought of what had happed meanwhile they knew  
Through the half-opened casements now there blew  
A sweet fresh air, that of the flowers and sea  
Mingled together, smelt deliciously,  
And from the unseen sun the spreading light  
Began to make the fair June blossoms bright,  
And midst their weary woe uprose the sun,  
And thus has Ogier's noble life begun.

H OPE is our life, when first our life grows clear ;  
Hope and delight, scarce crossed by lines of fear,  
Yet the day comes when fain we would not hope,  
But forasmuch as we with life must cope,  
Struggling with this and that, who knoweth why ?  
Hope will not give us up to certainty,  
But still must bide with us : and with this man,  
Whose life amid such promises began  
Great things she wrought ; but now the time has come  
When he no more on earth may have his home.

Great things he suffered, great delights he had,  
Unto great kings he gave good deeds for bad ;  
He ruled o'er kingdoms where his name no more  
Is had in memory, and on many a shore  
He left his sweat and blood to win a name  
Passing the bounds of earthly creatures' fame.  
A love he won and lost, a well-loved son  
Whose little day of promise soon was done :  
A tender wife he had, that he must leave  
Before his heart her love could well receive ;  
Those promised gifts, that on his careless head  
In those first hours of his fair life were shed  
He took unwitting, and unwitting spent,  
Nor gave himself to grief and discontent  
Because he saw the end a-drawing nigh.

Where is he now ? in what land must he die,  
To leave an empty name to us on earth ?  
A tale half true, to cast across our mirth  
Some pensive thoughts of life that might have been ;  
Where is he now, that all this life has seen ?

Behold, another eve upon the earth  
Than that calm evening of the warrior's birth ;  
The sun is setting in the west, the sky  
Is bright and clear and hard, and no clouds lie  
About the golden circle of the sun ;  
But East, aloof from him, heavy and dun  
Steel-grey they pack with edges red as blood,  
And underneath them is the weltering flood  
Of some huge sea, whose tumbling hills, as they  
Turn restless sides about, are black or grey,  
Or green, or glittering with the golden flame ;  
The wind has fallen now, but still the same  
The mighty army moves, as if to drown  
This lone, bare rock, whose shear scaped sides of brown  
Cast off the weight of waves in clouds of spray.

Alas ! what ships upon an evil day  
Bent over to the wind in this ill sea ?  
What navy, whose rent bones lie wretchedly  
Beneath these cliffs ? a mighty one it was,  
A fearful storm to bring such things to pass.

This is the loadstone rock ; no armament  
Of warring nations, in their madness bent  
Their course this way ; no merchant wittingly

Has steered his keel unto this luckless sea ;  
Upon no shipman's 'card its name is writ,  
Though worn-out mariners will speak of it  
Within the ingle on the winter's night,  
When all within is warm and safe and bright,  
And the wind howls without : but 'gainst their will  
Are some folk driven here, and then all skill  
Against this evil rock is vain and nought,  
And unto death the shipmen soon are brought ;  
For then the keel, as by a giant's hand,  
Is drawn unto that mockery of a land,  
And presently unto its sides doth cleave ;  
When if they 'scape swift death, yet none may leave  
The narrow limits of that barren isle,  
And thus are slain by famine in a while  
Mocked, as they say, by night with images  
Of noble castles among groves of trees,  
By day with sounds of merry minstrelsy.

The sun sinks now below this hopeless sea,  
The clouds are gone, and all the sky is bright ;  
The moon is rising o'er the growing night,  
And by its shine may ye behold the bones  
Of generations of these luckless ones  
Scattered about the rock ; but nigh the sea  
Sits one alive, who uncomplainingly  
Awaits his death. White-haired is he and old,  
Arrayed in royal raiment, bright with gold,  
But tarnished with the waves and rough salt air ;

Huge is he, of a noble face and fair,  
As for an ancient man, though toil and eld  
Furrow the cheeks that ladies once beheld  
With melting hearts—Nay, listen, for he speaks !

“God, Thou hast made me strong ! nigh seven weeks  
Have passed since from the wreck we haled our store,  
And five long days well told, have now passed o’er  
Since my last fellow died, with my last bread  
Between his teeth, and yet I am not dead.  
Yea, but for this I had been strong enow  
In some last bloody field my sword to show.  
What matter ? soon will all be past and done,  
Where’er I died I must have died alone :  
Yet, Caraheu, a good death had it been  
Dying, thy face above me to have seen,  
And heard my banner flapping in the wind,  
Then, though my memory had not left thy mind,  
Yet hope and fear would not have vexed thee more  
When thou hadst known that everything was o’er ;  
But now thou waitest, still expecting me,  
Whose sail shall never speck thy bright blue sea.

“And thou, Clarice, the merchants thou mayst call,  
To tell thee tales within thy pictured hall,  
But never shall they tell true tales of me :  
Whatever sails the Kentish hills may see  
Swept by the flood-tide toward thy well-walled town,  
No more on my sails shall they look adown.

“Get thee another leader, Charlemaine,  
For thou shalt look to see my shield in vain,



When in the fair fields of the Frankish land,  
Thick as the corn they tread, the heathen stand.

“What matter? ye shall learn to live your lives;  
Husbands and children, other friends and wives,  
Shall wipe the tablets of your memory clean,  
And all shall be as I had never been.

“And now, O God, am I alone with Thee;  
A little thing indeed it seems to be  
To give this life up, since it needs must go  
Some time or other; now at last I know  
How foolishly men play upon the earth,  
When unto them a year of life seems worth  
Honour and friends, and these vague hopes and sweet  
That like real things my dying heart do greet,  
Unreal while living on the earth I trod,  
And but myself I knew no other god.  
Behold, I thank Thee that Thou sweet’nest thus  
This end, that I had thought most piteous,  
If of another I had heard it told.”

What man is this, who weak and worn and old,  
Gives up his life within that dreadful isle,  
And on the fearful coming death can smile?  
Alas! this man, so battered and outworn,  
Is none but he, who, on that summer morn,  
Received such promises of glorious life:  
Ogier the Dane this is, to whom all strife  
Was but as wine to stir awhile the blood,

To whom all life, however hard, was good :  
This is the man, unmatched of heart and limb,  
Ogier the Dane, whose sight has waxed not dim  
For all the years that he on earth has dwelt ;  
Ogier the Dane, that never fear has felt,  
Since he knew good from ill ; Ogier the Dane,  
The heathen's dread, the evil-doer's bane.

BRIGHT had the moon grown as his words were  
done,

And no more was there memory of the sun  
Within the west, and he grew drowsy now,  
And somewhat smother was his wrinkled brow  
As thought died out beneath the hand of sleep,  
And o'er his soul forgetfulness did creep,  
Hiding the image of swift-coming death ;  
Until as peacefully he drew his breath  
As on that day, past for a hundred years,  
When, midst the nurse's quickly-falling tears,  
He fell asleep to his first lullaby.

The night changed as he slept, white clouds and high  
Began about the lonely moon to close ;  
And from the dark west a new wind arose,  
And with the sound of heavy-falling waves  
Mingled its pipe about the loadstone caves ;

But when the twinkling stars were hid away,  
And a faint light and broad, like dawn of day,  
The moon upon that dreary country shed,  
Ogier awoke, and lifting up his head  
And smiling, muttered, "Nay, no more again;  
Rather some pleasure new, some other pain,  
Unthought of both, some other form of strife;"  
For he had waked from dreams of his old life,  
And through St. Omer's archer-guarded gate  
Once more had seemed to pass, and saw the state  
Of that triumphant king; and still, though all  
Seemed changed, and folk by other names did call  
Faces he knew of old, yet none the less  
He seemed the same, and, midst that mightiness,  
Felt his own power, and grew the more athirst  
For coming glory, as of old, when first  
He stood before the face of Charlemaine,  
A helpless hostage with all life to gain.

But now, awake, his worn face once more sank  
Between his hands, and, murmuring not, he drank  
The draught of death that must that thirst allay.

But while he sat and waited for the day  
A sudden light across the bare rock streamed,  
Which at the first he noted not, but deemed  
The moon her fleecy veil had broken through;  
But ruddier indeed this new light grew  
Than were the moon's grey beams, and, therewithal  
Soft far-off music on his ears did fall;

Yet moved he not, but murmured, "This is death.  
An easy thing like this to yield my breath,  
Awake, yet dreaming, with no sounds of fear,  
No dreadful sights to tell me it is near ;  
Yea, God, I thank Thee !" but with that last word  
It seemed to him that he his own name heard  
Whispered, as though the wind had borne it past ;  
With that he gat unto his feet at last,  
But still awhile he stood, with sunken head,  
And in a low and trembling voice he said,  
"Lord, I am ready, whither shall I go ?  
I pray Thee unto me some token show."  
And, as he said this, round about he turned,  
And in the east beheld a light that burned  
As bright as day ; then, though his flesh might fear  
The coming change that he believed so near,  
Yet did his soul rejoice, for now he thought  
Unto the very heaven to be brought :  
And though he felt alive, deemed it might be  
That he in sleep had died full easily.

Then toward that light did he begin to go,  
And still those strains he heard, far off and low,  
That grew no louder ; still that bright light streamed  
Over the rocks, yet nothing brighter seemed,  
But like the light of some unseen bright flame  
Shone round about, until at last he came  
Unto the dreary islet's other shore,  
And then the minstrelsy he heard no more,  
And softer seemed the strange light unto him ,

But yet or ever it had grown quite dim,  
Beneath its waning light could he behold  
A mighty palace set about with gold,  
Above green meads and groves of summer trees  
Far-off across the welter of the seas ;  
But, as he gazed, it faded from his sight,  
And the grey hidden moon's diffused soft light,  
Which soothly was but darkness to him now,  
His sea-girt island prison did but show.

But o'er the sea he still gazed wistfully,  
And said, "Alas! and when will this go by  
And leave my soul in peace? must I still dream  
Of life that once so dear a thing did seem,  
That, when I wake, death may the bitterer be?  
Here will I sit until he come to me,  
And hide mine eyes and think upon my sin,  
That so a little calm I yet may win  
Before I stand within the awful place."

Then down he sat and covered up his face.  
Yet therewithal his trouble could not hide,  
Nor waiting thus for death could he abide,  
For, though he knew it not, the yearning pain  
Of hope of life had touched his soul again—  
If he could live awhile, if he could live!  
The mighty being, who once was wont to give  
The gift of life to many a trembling man ;  
Who did his own will since his life began ;  
Who feared not aught, but strong and great and free  
Still cast aside the thought of what might be ;

Must all this then be lost, and with no will,  
Powerless and blind, must he some fate fulfil,  
Nor know what he is doing any more ?

Soon he arose and paced along the shore,  
And gazed out seaward for the blessed light ;  
But nought he saw except the old sad sight,  
The ceaseless tumbling of the billows grey,  
The white upspringing of the spurts of spray  
Amidst that mass of timbers, the rent bones  
Of the sea-houses of the hapless ones  
Once cast like him upon this deadly isle.

He stopped his pacing in a little while,  
And clenched his mighty hands, and set his teeth,  
And gazing at the ruin underneath,  
He swung from off the bare cliff's jagged brow,  
And on some slippery ledge he wavered now,  
Without a hand-hold, and now stoutly clung  
With hands alone, and o'er the welter hung,  
Not caring aught if thus his life should end ;  
But safely amidst all this did he descend  
The dreadful cliff, and since no beach was there,  
But from the depths the rock rose stark and bare.  
Nor crumbled aught beneath the hammering sea,  
Upon the wrecks he stood unsteadily.

But now, amid the clamour of the waves,  
And washing to-and-fro of beams and staves,  
Dizzy with hunger, dreamy with distress,

And all those days of fear and loneliness,  
The ocean's tumult seemed the battle's roar,  
His heart grew hot, as when in days of yore  
He heard the cymbals clash amid the crowd  
Of dusky faces ; now he shouted loud,  
And from crushed beam to beam began to leap,  
And yet his footing somehow did he keep  
Amidst their tossing, and indeed the sea  
Was somewhat sunk upon the island's lee.  
So quickly on from wreck to wreck he passed,  
And reached the outer line of wrecks at last,  
And there a moment stood unsteadily,  
Amid the drift of spray that hurried by,  
And drew Courtain his sword from out its sheath,  
And poised himself to meet the coming death,  
Still looking out to sea ; but as he gazed,  
And once or twice his doubtful feet he raised  
To take the final plunge, that heavenly strain  
Over the washing waves he heard again,  
And from the dimness something bright he saw  
Across the waste of waters towards him draw ;  
And hidden now, now raised aloft, at last  
Unto his very feet a boat was cast,  
Gilded inside and out, and well arrayed  
With cushions soft ; far fitter to have weighed  
From some sweet garden on the shallow Seine,  
Or in a reach of green Thames to have lain,  
Than struggle with that huge confused sea ;  
But Ogier gazed upon it doubtfully

One moment, and then, sheathing Courtain, said,  
“What tales are these about the newly dead  
The heathen told? what matter, let all pass;  
This moment as one dead indeed I was,  
And this must be what I have got to do,  
I yet perchance may light on something new  
Before I die; though yet perchance this keel  
Unto the wondrous mass of charmed steel  
Is drawn as others.” With that word he leapt  
Into the boat, and o’er the cushions crept  
From stem to stern, but found no rudder there,  
Nor any oars, nor were the cushions fair  
Made wet by any dashing of the sea.

Now while he pondered how these things could be,  
The boat began to move therefrom at last,  
But over him a drowsiness was cast,  
And as o’er tumbling hills the skiff did pass,  
He clean forgot his death and where he was.

At last he woke up to a sunny day,  
And, looking round, saw that his shallop lay  
Moored at the edge of some fair tideless sea  
Unto an overhanging thick-leaved tree,  
Where in the green waves did the low bank dip  
Its fresh and green grass-covered daisied lip;  
But Ogier looking thence no more could see  
That sad abode of death and misery,  
Nor aught but wide and empty ocean, grey  
With gathering haze, for now it neared midday;



Then from the golden cushions did he rise,  
And wondering still if this were Paradise  
He stepped ashore, but drew Courtain his sword  
And muttered therewithal a holy word.

Fair was the place, as though amidst of May,  
Nor diu the brown birds fear the sunny day,  
For with their quivering song the air was sweet ;  
Thick grew the field-flowers underneath his feet,  
And on his head the blossoms down did rain,  
Yet mid these fair things slowly and with pain  
He 'gan to go, yea, even when his foot  
First touched the flowery sod, to his heart's root  
A coldness seemed to strike, and now each limb  
Was growing stiff, his eyes waxed bleared and dim,  
And all his stored-up memory 'gan to fail,  
Nor yet would his once mighty heart avail  
For lamentations o'er his chang'd lot ;  
Yet urged by some desire, he knew not what,  
Along a little path 'twixt hedges sweet,  
Drawn sword in hand, he dragged his faltering feet,  
For what then seemed to him a weary way,  
Whereon his steps he needs must often stay  
And lean upon the mighty well-worn sword  
That in those hands, grown old, for king or lord  
Had small respect in glorious days long past.

But still he crept along, and at the last  
Came to a gilded wicket, and through this  
Entered a garden fit for utmost bliss,

If that might last which needs must soon go by :  
There 'gainst a tree he leaned, and with a sigh  
He said, "O God, a sinner I have been,  
And good it is that I these things have seen  
Before I meet what Thou hast set apart  
To cleanse the earthly folly from my heart ;  
But who within this garden now can dwell  
Wherein guilt first upon the world befell ?"

A little further yet he staggered on,  
Till to a fountain-side at last he won,  
O'er which two white-thorns their sweet blossoms shed.  
There he sank down, and laid his weary head  
Beside the mossy roots, and in a while  
He slept, and dreamed himself within the isle ;  
That splashing fount the weary sea did seem,  
And in his dream the fair place but a dream ;  
But when again to feebleness he woke  
Upon his ears that heavenly music broke,  
Not faint or far as in the isle it was,  
But e'en as though the minstrels now did pass  
Anigh his resting-place ; then fallen in doubt,  
E'en as he might, he rose and gazed about,  
Leaning against the hawthorn stem with pain ;  
And yet his straining gaze was but in vain,  
Death stole so fast upon him, and no more  
Could he behold the blossoms as before,  
No more the trees seemed rooted to the ground,  
A heavy mist seemed gathering all around,  
And in its heart some bright thing seemed to be,

And round his head there breathed deliciously  
Sweet odours, and that music never ceased.  
But as the weight of Death's strong hand increased  
Again he sank adown, and Courtain's noise  
Within the scabbard seemed a farewell voice  
Sent from the world he loved so well of old,  
And all his life was as a story told,  
And as he thought thereof he 'gan to smile  
E'en as a child asleep, but in a while  
It was as though he slept, and sleeping dreamed,  
For in his half-closed eyes a glory gleamed,  
As though from some sweet face and golden hair,  
And on his breast were laid soft hands and fair,  
And a sweet voice was ringing in his ears,  
Broken as if with flow of joyous tears ;

“Ogier, sweet friend, hast thou not tarried long?  
Alas ! thine hundred years of strife and wrong !”  
Then he found voice to say, “Alas ! dear Lord,  
Too long, too long ; and yet one little word  
Right many a year ago had brought me here.”  
Then to his face that face was drawn anear,  
He felt his head raised up and gently laid  
On some kind knee, again the sweet voice said,  
“Nay, Ogier, nay, not yet, not yet, dear friend !  
Who knoweth when our linked life shall end,  
Since thou art come unto mine arms at last,  
And all the turmoil of the world is past ?  
Why do I linger ere I see thy face  
As I desired it in that mourning place

'So many years ago—so many years,  
Thou knewest not thy love and all her fears?"  
"Alas!" he said, "what mockery then is this  
That thou wilt speak to me of earthly bliss?  
No longer can I think upon the earth,  
Have I not done with all its grief and mirth?  
Yes, I was Ogier once, but if my love  
Should come once more my dying heart to move,  
Then must she come from 'neath the milk-white walls  
Whereon to-day the hawthorn blossom falls  
Outside St. Omer's—art thou she? her name  
Which I remembered once mid death and fame  
Is clean forgotten now; but yesterday,  
Meseems, our son, upon her bosom lay:  
Baldwin the fair—what hast thou done with him  
Since Charlot slew him? Ah, mine eyes wax dim;  
Woman, forbear! wilt thou not let me die?  
Did I forget thee in the days gone by?  
Then let me die, that we may meet again!"

He tried to move from her, but all in vain,  
For life had well-nigh left him, but withal  
He felt a kiss upon his forehead fall,  
And could not speak; he felt slim fingers fair  
Move to his mighty sword-worn hand, and there  
Set on some ring, and still he could not speak,  
And once more sleep weighed down his eyelids weak.

BUT, ah ! what land was this he woke unto ?  
What joy was this that filled his heart anew ?  
Had he then gained the very Paradise ?  
Trembling, he durst not at the first arise,  
Although no more he felt the pain of eld,  
Nor durst he raise his eyes that now beheld  
Beside him the white flowers and blades of grass ;  
He durst not speak, lest he some monster was.

But while he lay and hoped, that gentle voice  
Once more he heard ; “ Yea, thou mayst well rejoice  
Thou livest still, my sweet, thou livest still,  
Apart from every earthly fear and ill ;  
Wilt thou not love me, who have wrought thee this,  
That I like thee may live in double bliss ? ”

Then Ogier rose up, nowise like to one  
Whose span of earthly life is nigh outrun,  
But as he might have risen in old days  
To see the spears cleave the fresh morning haze ;  
But, looking round, he saw no change there was  
In the fair place wherethrough he first did pass,  
Though all, grown clear and joyous to his eyes,  
Now looked no worse than very Paradise ;  
Behind him were the thorns, the fountain fair  
Still sent its glittering stream forth into air,  
And by its basin a fair woman stood,  
And as their eyes met his new-healéd blood  
Rushed to his face ; with unused thoughts and sweet

And hurrying hopes, his heart began to beat.

The fairest of all creatures did she seem ;  
So fresh and delicate you well might deem  
That scarce for eighteen summers had she blessed  
The happy, longing world ; yet, for the rest,  
Within her glorious eyes such wisdom dwelt  
A child before her had the wise man felt,  
And with the pleasure of a thousand years  
Her lips were fashioned to move joy or tears  
Among the longing folk where she might dwell,  
To give at last the kiss unspeakable.

In such wise was she clad as folk may be,  
Who, for no shame of their humanity,  
For no sad changes of the imperfect year,  
Rather for added beauty, raiment wear ;  
For, as the heat-foretelling grey-blue haze  
Veils the green flowery morn of late May-days,  
Her raiment veiled her ; where the bands did meet  
That bound the sandals to her dainty feet,  
Gems gleamed ; a fresh rose-wreath embraced her head,  
And on her breast there lay a ruby red.

So with a supplicating look she turned  
To meet the flame that in his own eyes burned,  
And held out both her white arms lovingly,  
As though to greet him as he drew anigh.  
Stammering he said, " Who art thou ? how am I  
So cured of all my evils suddenly,  
That certainly I felt no mightier, when,  
Amid the backward rush of beaten men,

About me drooped the axe-torn Oriflamme ?

Alas ! I fear that in some dream I am."

"Ogier," she said, "draw near, perchance it is  
That such a name God gives unto our bliss ;  
I know not, but if thou art such an one  
As I must deem, all days beneath the sun  
That thou hadst had, shall be but dreams indeed  
To those that I have given thee at thy need.  
For many years ago beside the sea  
When thou wert born, I plighted troth with thee :  
Come near then, and make mirrors of mine eyes,  
That thou mayst see what these my mysteries  
Have wrought in thee ; surely but thirty years,  
Passed amidst joy, thy new born body bears,  
Nor while thou art with me, and on this shore  
Art still full-fed of love, shalt thou seem more.  
Nay, love, come nigher, and let me take thine hand,  
The hope and fear of many a warring land,  
And I will show thee wherein lies the spell,  
Whereby this happy change upon thee fell."

Like a shy youth before some royal love,  
Close up to that fair woman did he move,  
And their hands met ; yet to his changed voice  
He dared not trust ; nay, scarcely could rejoice  
E'en when her balmy breath he 'gan to feel,  
And felt strange sweetness o'er his spirit steal  
As her light raiment, driven by the wind,  
Swept round him, and, bewildered and half-blind,

His lips the treasure of her lips did press,  
And round him clung her perfect loveliness.

For one sweet moment thus they stood, and then  
She drew herself from out his arms again,  
And panting, lovelier for her love, did stand  
Apart awhile, then took her lover's hand,  
And, in a trembling voice, made haste to say,—

“ O Ogier, when thou camest here to-day,  
I feared indeed, that in my play with fate,  
I might have seen thee e'en one day too late,  
Before this ring thy finger should embrace ;  
Behold it, love, and thy keen eyes may trace  
Faint figures wrought upon the ruddy gold ·  
My father dying gave it me, nor told  
The manner of its making, but I know  
That it can make thee e'en as thou art now  
Despite the laws of God—shrink not from me  
Because I give an impious gift to thee—  
Has not God made me also, who do this ?  
But I, who longed to share with thee my bliss,  
Am of the fays, and live their changeless life,  
And, like the gods of old, I see the strife  
That moves the world, unmoved if so I will ;  
For we the fruit, that teaches good and ill,  
Have never touched like you of Adam's race ;  
And while thou dwellest with me in this place  
Thus shalt thou be—ah, and thou deem'st, indeed,  
That thou shalt gain thereby no happy meed  
Reft of the world's joys ? nor canst understand



How thou art come into a happy land? —  
Love, in thy world the priests of heaven still sing,  
And tell thee of it many a joyous thing;  
But think'st thou, bearing the world's joy and pain,  
Thou couldst live there? nay, nay, but born again  
Thou wouldst be happy with the angels' bliss;  
And so with us no otherwise it is,  
Nor hast thou cast thine old life quite away  
Even as yet, though that shall be to-day.

“ But for the love and country thou hast won,  
Know thou, that thou art come to Avallon,  
That is both thine and mine; and as for me,  
Morgan le Fay men call me commonly  
Within the world, but fairer names than this  
I have for thee and me, 'twixt kiss and kiss.”

Ah, what was this? and was it all in vain,  
That she had brought him here this life to gain?  
For, ere her speech was done, like one turned blind  
He watched the kisses of the wandering wind  
Within her raiment, or as some one sees  
The very best of well-wrought images  
When he is blind with grief, did he behold  
The wandering tresses of her locks of gold  
Upon her shoulders; and no more he pressed  
The hand that in his own hand lay at rest:  
His eyes, grown dull with changing memories,  
Could make no answer to her glorious eyes:  
Cold waxed his heart, and weary and distraught,

With many a cast-by, hateful, dreary thought,  
Unfinished in the old days ; and wital  
He needs must think of what might chance to fall  
In this life new-begun ; and good and bad  
Tormented him, because as yet he had  
A worldly heart within his frame made new,  
And to the deeds that he was wont to do  
Did his desires still turn. But she a while  
Stood gazing at him with a doubtful smile,  
And let his hand fall down ; and suddenly  
Sounded sweet music from some close nearby,  
And then she spoke again : " Come, love, with me,  
That thou thy new life and delights mayst see."  
And gently with that word she led him thence,  
And though upon him now there fell a sense  
Of dreamy and unreal bewilderment,  
As hand in hand through that green place they went,  
Yet therewithal a strain of tender love  
A little yet his restless heart did move.

So through the whispering trees they came at last  
To where a wondrous house a shadow cast  
Across the flowers, and o'er the daisied grass  
Before it, crowds of lovely folk did pass,  
Playing about in carelessness and mirth,  
Unshadowed by the doubtful deeds of earth ;  
And from the midst a band of fair girls came,  
With flowers and music, greeting him by name,  
And praising him ; but ever like a dream

He could not break, did all to Ogier seem.  
And he his old world did the more desire,  
For in his heart still burned unquenched the fire,  
That through the world of old so bright did burn :  
Yet was he fain that kindness to return,  
And from the depth of his full heart he sighed.

Then toward the house the lovely Queen did guide  
His listless steps, and seemed to take no thought  
Of knitted brow or wandering eyes distraught,  
But still with kind love lighting up her face  
She led him through the door of that fair place,  
While round about them did the damsels press ;  
And he was moved by all that loveliness  
As one might be, who, lying half asleep  
In the May morning, notes the light wind sweep  
Over the tulip-beds : no more to him  
Were gleaming eyes, red lips, and bodies slim,  
Amidst that dream, although the first surprise  
Of hurried love wherewith the Queen's sweet eyes  
Had smitten him, still in his heart did stir.

And so at last he came, led on by her  
Into a hall wherein a fair throne was,  
And hand in hand thereto the twain did pass ;  
And there she bade him sit, and when alone  
He took his place upon the double throne,  
She cast herself before him on her knees,  
Embracing his, and greatly did increase  
The shame and love that vexed his troubled heart :

But now a line of girls the crowd did part,  
Lovelier than all, and Ogier could behold  
One in their midst who bore a crown of gold  
Within her slender hands and delicate ;  
She, drawing nigh, beside the throne did wait  
Until the Queen arose and took the crown,  
Who then to Ogier's lips did stoop adown  
And kissed him, and said, " Ogier, what were worth  
Thy miserable days of strife on' earth,  
That on their ashes still thine eyes are turned ? "

Then, as she spoke these words, his changed heart  
burned

With sudden memories, and thereto had he  
Made answer, but she raised up suddenly  
The crown she held and set it on his head,  
" Ogier," she cried, " those troublous days are dead ;  
Thou wert dead with them also, but for me ;  
Turn unto her who wrought these things for thee ! "

Then, as he felt her touch, a mighty wave  
Of love swept o'er his soul, as though the grave  
Did really hold his body ; from his seat  
He rose to cast himself before her feet ;  
But she clung round him, and in close embrace  
The twain were locked amidst that thronging place.

Thenceforth new life indeed has Ogier won,  
And in the happy land of Avallon  
Quick glide the years o'er his unchanging head ;  
There saw he many men the world thought dead,

Living like him in sweet forgetfulness  
Of all the troubles that did once oppress  
Their vainly-struggling lives—ah, how can I  
Tell of their joy as though I had been nigh?  
Suffice it that no fear of death they knew,  
That there no talk there was of false or true,  
Of right or wrong, for traitors came not there;  
That everything was bright and soft and fair,  
And yet they wearied not for any change,  
Nor unto them did constancy seem strange.  
Love knew they, but its pain they never had,  
But with each other's joy were they made glad;  
Nor were their lives wasted by hidden fire,  
Nor knew they of the unfulfilled desire  
That turns to ashes all the joys of earth,  
Nor knew they yearning love amidst the dearth  
Of kind and loving hearts to spend it on,  
Nor dreamed of discontent when all was won;  
Nor need they struggle after wealth and fame;  
Still was the calm flow of their lives the same,  
And yet, I say, they wearied not of it—  
So did the promised days by Ogier flit.

THINK that a hundred years have now passed by,  
Since ye beheld Ogier lie down to die  
Beside the fountain; think that now ye are  
In France, made dangerous with wasting war;

In Paris, where about each guarded gate,  
Gathered in knots, the anxious people wait,  
And press around each new-come man to learn  
If Harfleur now the pagan wasters burn,  
Or if the Rouen folk can keep their chain,  
Or Pont de l'Arche unburnt still guards the Seine ?  
Or if 'tis true that Andelys succour wants ?  
That Vernon's folk are fleeing east to Mantes ?  
When will they come ? or rather is it true  
That a great band the Constable o'erthrew  
Upon the marshes of the lower Seine,  
And that their long-ships, turning back again,  
Caught by the high-raised waters of the bore  
Were driven here and there and cast ashore ?

Such questions did they ask, and, as fresh men  
Came hurrying in, they asked them o'er again,  
And from scared folk, or fools, or ignorant,  
Still got new lies, or tidings very scant.

But now amidst these men at last came one,  
A little ere the setting of the sun,  
With two stout men behind him, armed right well,  
Who ever as they rode on, sooth to tell,  
With doubtful eyes upon their master stared,  
Or looked about like troubled men and scared.  
And he they served was noteworthy indeed ;  
Of ancient fashion were his arms and weed,  
Rich past the wont of men in those sad times ;  
His face was bronzed, as though by burning climes,

But lovely as the image of a god  
Carved in the days before on earth Christ trod ;  
But solemn were his eyes, and grey as glass,  
And like to ruddy gold his fine hair was :  
A mighty man he was, and taller far  
Than those who on that day must bear the war  
The pagans waged : he by the warders stayed  
Scarce looked on them, but straight their words obeyed  
And showed his pass ; then, asked about his name  
And from what city of the world he came,  
Said, that men called him now the Ancient Knight,  
That he was come midst the king's men to fight  
From St. Omer's ; and as he spoke, he gazed  
Down on the thronging street as one amazed,  
And answered no more to the questioning  
Of frightened folk of this or that sad thing ;  
But, ere he passed on, turned about at last  
And on the wondering guard a strange look cast,  
And said, "St. Mary ! do such men as ye  
Fight with the wasters from across the sea ?  
Then, certes, are ye lost, however good  
Your hearts may be ; not such were those who stood  
Beside the Hammer-bearer years ago."

So said he, and as his fair armour shone  
With beauty of a time long passed away,  
So with the music of another day  
His deep voice thrilled the awe-struck, listening folk.

Yet from the crowd a mocking voice outbroke,

That cried, "Be merry, masters, fear ye nought,  
Surely good succour to our side is brought ;  
For here is Charlemaine come off his tomb  
To save his faithful city from its doom."

"Yea," said another, "this is certain news,  
Surely ye know how all the carvers use  
To carve the dead man's image at the best,  
That guards the place where he may lie at rest ;  
Wherefore this living image looks indeed,  
Spite of his ancient tongue and marvellous weed,  
To have but thirty summers."

At the name

Of Charlemaine, he turned to whence there came  
The mocking voice, and somewhat knit his brow,  
And seemed as he would speak, but scarce knew how;  
So with a half-sigh soon sank back again  
Into his dream, and shook his well-wrought rein,  
And silently went on upon his way.

And this was Ogier : on what evil day  
Has he then stumbled, that he needs must come,  
Midst war and ravage, to the ancient home  
Of his desires? did he grow weary then,  
And wish to strive once more with foolish men  
For worthless things? or is fair Avallon  
Sunk in the sea, and all that glory gone?

Nay, thus it happened—One day she came to him  
And said, "Ogier, thy name is waxing dim  
Upon the world that thou rememberest not ;



The heathen men are thick on many a spot  
Thine eyes have seen, and which I love therefore ;  
And God will give His wonted help no more.  
Wilt thou, then, help ? canst thou have any mind  
To give thy banner once more to the wind ?  
Since greater glory thou shalt win for this  
Than erst thou gatheredst ere thou cam'st to bliss :  
For men are dwindled both in heart and frame,  
Nor holds the fair land any such a name  
As thine, when thou wert living midst thy peers ;  
The world is worser for these hundred years."

From his calm eyes there gleamed a little fire,  
And in his voice was something of desire,  
To see the land where he was used to be,  
As now he answered : " Nay, choose thou for me,  
Thou art the wisest ; it is more than well  
Within this peaceful place with thee to dwell :  
Nor ill perchance in that old land to die,  
If, dying, I keep not the memory  
Of this fair life of ours." " Nay, nay," said she,  
" As to thy dying, that shall never be,  
Whiles that thou keep'st my ring—and now, behold,  
I take from thee thy charmed crown of gold,  
And thou wilt be the Ogier that thou wast  
Ere on the loadstone rock thy ship was cast :  
Yet thou shalt have thy youthful body still,  
And I will guard thy life from every ill."

So was it done, and Ogier, armed right well,

Sleeping, was borne away by some strong spell,  
And set upon the Flemish coast ; and thence  
Turned to St. Omer's, with a doubtful sense  
Of being in some wild dream, the while he knew  
That great delight forgotten was his due,  
That all which there might hap was of small worth.

So on he went, and sometimes unto mirth  
Did his attire move the country-folk,  
But oftener when strange speeches from him broke  
Concerning men and things for long years dead,  
He filled the listeners with great awe and dread ;  
For in such wild times as these people were  
Are men soon moved to wonder and to fear.

Now through the streets of Paris did he ride,  
And at a certain hostel did abide  
Throughout that night, and ere he went next day  
He saw a book that on a table lay,  
And opening it 'gan read in lazy mood :  
But long before it in that place he stood,  
Noting nought else ; for it did chronicle  
The deeds of men whom once he knew right well,  
When they were living in the flesh with him :  
Yea, his own deeds he saw, grown strange and dim  
Already, and true stories mixed with lies,  
Until, with many thronging memories  
Of those old days, his heart was so oppressed,  
He 'gan to wish that he might lie at rest,  
Forgetting all things : for indeed by this

Little remembrance had he of the bliss  
That wrapped his soul in peaceful Avallon.

But his changed life he needs must carry on ;  
For ye shall know the Queen was gathering men  
To send unto the good King, who as then  
In Rouen lay, beset by many a band  
Of those who carried terror through the land,  
And still by messengers for help he prayed :  
Therefore a mighty muster was being made,  
Of weak and strong, and brave and timorous,  
Before the Queen anigh her royal house.  
So thither on this morn did Ogier turn,  
Some certain news about the war to learn ;  
And when he came at last into the square,  
And saw the ancient palace great and fair  
Rise up before him as in other days,  
And in the merry morn the bright sun's rays  
Glittering on gathered helms and moving spears,  
He 'gan to feel as in the long-past years,  
And his heart stirred within him. Now the Queen  
Came from within, right royally beseen,  
And took her seat beneath a canopy,  
With lords and captains of the war anigh ;  
And as she came a mighty shout arose,  
And round about began the knights to close,  
Their oath of fealty to swear anew,  
And learn what service they had got to do.  
But so it was, that some their shouts must stay

To gaze at Ogier as he took his way  
Through the thronged place ; and quickly too he gat  
Unto the place whereas the Lady sat,  
For men gave place unto him, fearing him :  
For not alone was he most huge of limb,  
And dangerous, but something in his face,  
As his calm eyes looked o'er the crowded place,  
Struck men with awe ; and in the ancient days,  
When men might hope alive on gods to gaze,  
They would have thought, "The gods yet love our town  
And from the heavens have sent a great one down."

Withal unto the throne he came so near,  
That he the Queen's sweet measured voice could hear;  
And swiftly now within him wrought the change  
That first he felt amid those faces strange ;  
And his heart burned to taste the hurrying life  
With such desires, such changing sweetness rife.  
And yet, indeed, how should he live alone,  
Who in the old past days such friends had known ?  
Then he began to think of Caraheu,  
Of Bellicent the fair, and once more knew  
The bitter pain of rent and ended love.  
But while with hope and vain regret he strove,  
He found none 'twixt him and the Queen's high seat,  
And, stepping forth, he knelt before her feet  
And took her hand to swear, as was the way  
Of doing fealty in that ancient day,  
And raised his eyes to hers ; as fair was she  
As any woman of the world might be

Full-limbed and tall, dark-haired, from her deep eyes,  
The snare of fools, the ruin of the wise,  
Love looked unchecked ; and now her dainty hand,  
The well-knit holder of the golden wand,  
Trembled in his, she cast her eyes adown,  
And her sweet brow was knitted to a frown,  
As he, the taker of such oaths of yore,  
Now unto her all due obedience swore,  
Yet gave himself no name ; and now the Queen,  
Awed by his voice as other folk had been,  
Yet felt a trembling hope within her rise  
Too sweet to think of, and with love's surprise  
Her cheek grew pale ; she said, "Thy style and name  
Thou tellest not, nor what land of thy fame  
Is glad ; for, certes, some land must be glad,  
That in its bounds her house thy mother had."

"Lady," he said, "from what far land I come  
I well might tell thee, but another home  
Have I long dwelt in, and its name have I  
Forgotten now, forgotten utterly  
Who were my fellows, and what deeds they did ;  
Therefore, indeed, shall my first name be hid  
And my first country ; call me on this day  
The Ancient Knight, and let me go my way."  
He rose withal, for she her fingers fair  
Had drawn aback, and on him 'gan to stare  
As one afeard ; for something terrible  
Was in his speech, and that she knew right well,  
Who 'gan to love him, and to fear that she,

Shut out by some strange deadly mystery,  
Should never gain from him an equal love ;  
Yet, as from her high seat he 'gan to move,  
She said, "O Ancient Knight, come presently,  
When we have done this muster, unto me,  
And thou shalt have thy charge and due command  
For freeing from our foes this wretched land !"

Then Ogier made his reverence and went,  
And somewhat could perceive of her intent ;  
For in his heart life grew, and love with life  
Grew, and therewith, 'twixt love and fame, was strife.

But, as he slowly gat him from the square,  
Gazing at all the people gathered there,  
A squire of the Queen's behind him came,  
And breathless, called him by his new-coined name,  
And bade him turn because the Queen now bade,  
Since by the muster long she might be stayed,  
That to the palace he should bring him straight,  
Midst sport and play her coming back to wait ;  
Then Ogier turned, nought loath, and with him went,  
And to a postern-gate his steps he bent,  
That Ogier knew right well in days of old ;  
Worn was it now, and the bright hues and gold  
Upon the shields above, with lapse of days,  
Were faded much : but now did Ogier gaze  
Upon the garden where he walked of yore,  
Holding the hands that he should see no more ;  
For all was changed except the palace fair,  
That Charlemaine's own eyes had seen built there

Ere Ogier knew him ; there the squire did lead  
The Ancient Knight, who still took little heed  
Of all the things that by the way he said,  
For all his thoughts were on the days long dead.

There in the painted hall he sat again,  
And 'neath the pictured eyes of Charlemaine  
He ate and drank, and felt it like a dream ;  
And midst his growing longings yet might deem  
That he from sleep should wake up presently  
In some fair city on the Syrian sea,  
Or on the brown rocks of the loadstone isle.  
But fain to be alone, within a while  
He gat him to the garden, and there passed  
By wondering squires and damsels, till at last,  
Far from the merry folk who needs must play,  
If on the world were coming its last day,  
He sat him down, and through his mind there ran  
Faint thoughts of that day, when, outworn and wan,  
He lay down by the fountain-side to die.  
But when he strove to gain clear memory  
Of what had happed since on the isle he lay  
Waiting for death, a hopeless castaway,  
Thought, failing him, would rather bring again  
His life among the peers of Charlemaine,  
And vex his soul with hapless memories ;  
Until at last, worn out by thought of these,  
And hopeless striving to find what was true,  
And pondering on the deeds he had to do  
Ere he returned, whereto he could not tell,

Sweet sleep upon his wearied spirit fell.  
And on the afternoon of that fair day,  
Forgetting all, beneath the trees he lay.

Meanwhile the Queen, affairs of state being done,  
Went through the gardens with one dame alone  
Seeking for Ogier, whom at last she found  
Laid sleeping on the daisy-sprinkled ground.  
Dreaming, I know not what, of other days.  
Then on him for a while the Queen did gaze,  
Drawing sweet poison from the lovely sight,  
Then to her fellow turned, "The Ancient Knight—  
What means he by this word of his?" she said;  
"He were well mated with some lovely maid  
Just pondering on the late-heard name of love."

"Softly, my lady, he begins to move,"  
Her fellow said, a woman old and grey;  
"Look now, his arms are of another day;  
None know him or his deeds; thy squire just said  
He asked about the state of men long dead;  
I fear what he may be; look, seest thou not  
That ring that on one finger he has got,  
Where figures strange upon the gold are wrought:  
God grant that he from hell has not been brought  
For our confusion, in this doleful war,  
Who surely in enough of trouble are  
Without such help;" then the Queen turned aside  
Awhile, her drawn and troubled face to hide,  
For lurking dread this speech within her stirred;



But yet she said, "Thou sayest a foolish word,  
This man is come against our enemies  
To fight for us." Then down upon her knees  
Fell the old woman by the sleeping knight,  
And from his hand she drew with fingers light  
The wondrous ring, and scarce again could rise  
Ere 'neath the trembling Queen's bewildered eyes  
The change began ; his golden hair turned white,  
His smooth cheek wrinkled, and his breathing light  
Was turned to troublous struggling for his breath,  
And on his shrunk lips lay the hand of death ;  
And, scarce less pale than he, the trembling Queen  
Stood thinking on the beauty she had seen  
And longed for but a little while ago,  
Yet with her terror still her love did grow,  
And she began to weep as though she saw  
Her beauty e'en to such an ending draw.  
And 'neath her tears waking he oped his eyes,  
And strove to speak, but nought but gasping sighs  
His lips could utter ; then he tried to reach  
His hand to them, as though he would beseech  
The gift of what was his : but all the while  
The crone gazed on them with an evil smile,  
Then holding toward the Queen that wondrous ring,  
She said, "Why weep'st thou ? having this fair thing,  
Thou, losing nought the beauty that thou hast,  
May'st watch the vainly struggling world go past,  
Thyself unchanged." The Queen put forth her hand  
And took the ring, and there awhile did stand

And strove to think of it, but still in her  
Such all-absorbing longings love did stir,  
So young she was, of death she could not think,  
Or what a cup eld gives to man to drink ;  
Yet on her finger had she set the ring  
When now the life that hitherto did cling  
To Ogier's heart seemed fading quite away,  
And scarcely breathing with shut eyes he lay.  
Then, kneeling down, she murmured piteously,  
"Ah, wilt thou love me if I give it thee,  
And thou grow'st young again ? what should I do  
If with the eyes thou thus shalt gain anew  
Thou shouldst look scorn on me ?" But with that word  
The hedge behind her, by the west wind stirred,  
Cast fear into her heart of some one nigh,  
And therewith on his finger hastily  
She set the ring, then rose and stood apart  
A little way, and in her doubtful heart  
With love and fear was mixed desire of life.

But standing so, a look with great scorn rife  
The elder woman, turning, cast on her,  
Pointing to Ogier, who began to stir ;  
She looked, and all she erst saw now did seem  
To have been nothing but a hideous dream,  
As fair and young he rose from off the ground  
And cast a dazed and puzzled look around,  
Like one just waked from sleep in some strange place ;  
But soon his grave eyes rested on her face,  
And turned yet graver seeing her so pale,

And that her eyes were pregnant with some tale  
Of love and fear ; she 'neath his eyes the while  
Forced her pale lips to semblance of a smile,  
And said, "O Ancient Knight, thou sleepest then ?  
While through this poor land range the heathen men  
Unmet of any but my King and Lord :  
Nay, let us see the deeds of thine old sword."

"Queen," said he, "bid me then unto this work,  
And certes I behind no wall would lurk,  
Nor send for succour, while a scanty folk  
Still followed after me to break the yoke :  
I pray thee grace for sleeping, and were fain  
That I might rather never sleep again  
Then have such wretched dreams as I e'en now  
Have waked from."

Lovelier she seemed to grow  
Unto him as he spoke ; fresh colour came  
Into her face, as though for some sweet shame,  
While she with tearful eyes beheld him so,  
That somewhat even must his burnt cheek glow,  
His heart beat faster. But again she said,  
"Nay, will dreams burden such a mighty head ?  
Then may I too have pardon for a dream :  
Last night in sleep I saw thee, who didst seem  
To be the King of France ; and thou and I  
Were sitting at some great festivity  
Within the many-peopled gold-hung place."

The blush of shame was gone as on his face  
She gazed, and saw him read her meaning clear

And knew that no cold words she had to fear,  
But rather that for softer speech he yearned.  
Therefore, with love alone her smooth cheek burned ;  
Her parted lips were hungry for his kiss,  
She trembled at the near approaching bliss ;  
Nathless, she checked her love a little while,  
Because she felt the old dame's curious smile  
Upon her, and she said, " O Ancient Knight,  
If I then read my last night's dream aright,  
Thou art come here our very help to be,  
Perchance to give my husband back to me ;  
Come then, if thou this land art fain to save,  
And show the wisdom thou must surely have  
Unto my council ; I will give thee then  
What charge I may among my valiant men ;  
And certes thou wilt do so well herein,  
That, ere long, something greater shalt thou win :  
Come, then, deliverer of my throne and land,  
And let me touch for once thy mighty hand  
With these weak fingers."

As she spoke, she met  
His eager hand, and all things did forget  
But for one moment, for too wise were they  
To cast the coming years of joy away ;  
Then with her other hand her gown she raised  
And led him thence, and o'er her shoulder gazed  
At her old follower with a doubtful smile,  
As though to say, " Be wise, I know thy guile !"  
But slowly she behind the lovers walked,

Muttering, "So be it ! thou shalt not be balked  
Of thy desire ; be merry ! I am wise,  
Nor will I rob thee of thy Paradise  
For any other than myself ; and thou  
May'st even happen to have had enow  
Of this new love, before I get the ring,  
And I may work for thee no evil thing."

Now ye shall know that the old chronicle,  
Wherein I read all this, doth duly tell  
Of all the gallant deeds that Ogier did,  
There may ye read them ; nor let me be chid  
If I therefore say little of these things,  
Because the thought of Avallon still clings  
Unto my heart, and scarcely can I bear  
To think of that long, dragging, useless year,  
Through which, with dulled and glimmering memory,  
Ogier was grown content to live and die  
Like other men ; but this I have to say,  
That in the council chamber on that day  
The Old Knight showed his wisdom well enow,  
While fainter still with love the Queen did grow  
Hearing his words, beholding his grey eyes  
Flashing with fire of warlike memories ;  
Yea, at the last he seemed so wise indeed  
That she could give him now the charge, to lead  
One wing of the great army that set out  
From Paris' gates, midst many a wavering shout,  
Midst trembling prayers, and unchecked wails and tears,

And slender hopes and unresisted fears.

Now ere he went, upon his bed he lay,  
Newly awakened at the dawn of day,  
Gathering perplexéd thoughts of many a thing,  
When, midst the carol that the birds did sing  
Unto the coming of the hopeful sun,  
He heard a sudden lovesome song begun  
'Twixt two young voices in the garden green;  
That seemed indeed the farewell of the Queen.

## SONG.

HÆC.

*In the white-flowered hawthorn brake,  
Love, be merry for my sake;  
Twine the blossoms in my hair,  
Kiss me where I am most fair—  
Kiss me, love! for who knoweth  
What thing cometh after death?*

ILLE.

*Nay, the garlanded gold hair  
Hides thee where thou art most fair;  
Hides the rose-tinged hills of snow—  
Ah, sweet love, I have thee now!  
Kiss me, love! for who knoweth  
What thing cometh after death?*

## HÆC.

*Shall we weep for a dead day,  
Or set Sorrow in our way?  
Hidden by my golden hair,  
Wilt thou weep that sweet days wear?  
Kiss me, love! for who knoweth  
What thing cometh after death?*

## ILLE.

*Weep, 'O Love, the days that flit,  
Now, while I can feel thy breath,  
Then may I remember it  
Sad and old, and near my death.  
Kiss me, love! for who knoweth  
What thing cometh after death?*

Soothed by the pleasure that the music brought  
And sweet desire, and vague and dreamy thought  
Of happiness it seemed to promise him,  
He lay and listened till his eyes grew dim,  
And o'er him 'gan forgetfulness to creep  
Till in the growing light he lay asleep,  
Nor woke until the clanging trumpet-blast  
Had summoned him all thought away to cast:  
Yet one more joy of love indeed he had  
Ere with the battle's noise he was made glad;  
For, as on that May morning forth they rode  
And passed before the Queen's most fair abode,

There at a window was she waiting them  
In fair attire with gold in every hem,  
And as the Ancient Knight beneath her passed  
A wreath of flowering white-thorn down she cast,  
And looked farewell to him, and forth he set  
Thinking of all the pleasure he should get  
From love and war, forgetting Avallon  
And all that lovely life so lightly won ;  
Yea, now indeed the earthly life o'erpast  
Ere on the loadstone rock his ship was cast  
Was waxing dim, nor yet at all he learned  
To 'scape the fire that erst his heart had burned.  
And he forgot his deeds, forgot his fame,  
Forgot the letters of his ancient name  
As one waked fully shall forget a dream,  
That once to him a wondrous tale did seem.

Now I, though writing here no chronicle  
E'en as I said, must nathless shortly tell  
That, ere the army Rouen's gates could gain  
By a broad arrow had the King been slain,  
And helpless now the wretched country lay  
Beneath the yoke, until the glorious day  
When Ogier fell at last upon the foe,  
And scattered them as helplessly as though  
They had been beaten men without a name :  
So when to Paris town once more he came  
Few folk the memory of the King did keep  
Within their hearts, and if the folk did weep



At his returning, 'twas for joy indeed  
That such a man had risen at their need  
To work for them so great deliverance,  
And loud they called on him for King of France.

But if the Queen's heart were the more a-flame  
For all that she had heard of his great fame,  
I know not ; rather with some hidden dread  
Of coming fate, she heard her lord was dead,  
And her false dream seemed coming true at last,  
For the clear sky of love seemed overcast  
With clouds of God's great judgments, and the fear  
Of hate and final parting drawing near.

So now when he before her throne did stand  
Amidst the throng as saviour of the land,  
And she her eyes to his kind eyes did raise,  
And there before all her own love must praise ;  
Then did she fall a-weeping, and folk said,  
"See, how she sorrows for the newly dead !  
Amidst our joy she needs must think of him ;  
Let be, full surely shall her grief wax dim  
And she shall wed again."

So passed the year,  
While Ogier set himself the land to clear  
Of broken remnants of the heathen men,  
And at the last, when May-time came again,  
Must he be crowned King of the twice-saved land,  
And at the altar take the fair Queen's hand  
And wed her for his own. And now by this

Had he forgotten clean the woe and bliss  
Of his old life, and still was he made glad  
As other men ; and hopes and fears he had  
As others, and bethought him not at all  
Of what strange days upon him yet should fall  
When he should live and these again be dead.

Now drew the time round when he should be wed,  
And in his palace on his bed he lay  
Upon the dawning of the very day :  
'Twixt sleep and waking was he, and could hear  
E'en at that hour, through the bright morn and clear,  
The hammering of the folk who toiled to make  
Some well-wrought stages for the pageant's sake,  
Though hardly yet the sparrows had begun  
To twitter o'er the coming of the sun,  
Nor through the palace did a creature move.

There in the sweet entanglement of love  
Midst languid thoughts of greater bliss he lay,  
Remembering no more of that other day  
Than the hot noon remembereth of the night,  
Than summer thinketh of the winter white.

In that sweet hour he heard a voice that cried,  
"Ogier, Ogier !" then, opening his eyes wide,  
And rising on his elbow, gazed around,  
And strange to him and empty was the sound  
Of his own name ; " Whom callest thou ?" he said  
" For I, the man who lie upon this bed,  
Am Charles of France, and shall be King to-day,

But in a year that now is passed away  
The Ancient Knight they called me : who is this,  
Thou callest Ogier, then, what deeds are his ?  
And who art thou ?” But at that word a sigh,  
As of one grieved, came from some place anigh  
His bed-side, and a soft voice spake again,  
“ This Ogier once was great amongst great men ;  
To Italy a helpless hostage led ;  
He saved the King when the false Lombard fled,  
Bore forth the Oriflamme and gained the day ;  
Charlot he brought back, whom men led away,  
And fought a day-long fight with Caraheu.  
The ravager of Rome his right hand slew ;  
Nor did he fear the might of Charlemaine,  
Who for a dreary year beset in vain  
His lonely castle ; yet at last caught then,  
And shut in hold, needs must he come again  
To give an unhoped great deliverance  
Unto the burdened helpless land of France :  
Denmark he gained thereafter, and he wore  
The crown of England drawn from trouble sore ;  
At Tyre then he reigned, and Babylon  
With mighty deeds he from the foemen won ;  
And when scarce aught could give him greater fame,  
He left the world still thinking on his name.

“ These things did Ogier, and these things didst thou,  
Nor will I call thee by a new name now  
Since I have spoken words of love to thee—  
Ogier, Ogier, dost thou remember me,

E'en if thou hast no thought of that past time  
Before thou camest to our happy clime?"

As this was said, his mazed eyes saw indeed  
A lovely woman clad in dainty weed  
Beside his bed, and many a thought was stirred  
Within his heart by that last plaintive word,  
Though nought he said, but waited what should come  
"Love," said she, "I am here to bring thee home ;  
Well hast thou done all that thou cam'st to do,  
And if thou bidest here, for something new  
Will folk begin to cry, and all thy fame  
Shall then avail thee but for greater blame ;  
Thy love shall cease to love thee, and the earth  
Thou lovest now shall be of little worth  
While still thou keepest life, abhorring it.  
Behold, in men's lives that so quickly flit  
Thus is it, how then shall it be with thee,  
Who some faint image of eternity  
Hast gained through me ?—alas, thou heedest not !  
On all these changing things thine heart is hot—  
Take then this gift that I have brought from far,  
And then may'st thou remember what we are ;  
The lover and the loved from long ago."

He trembled, and more memory seemed to grow  
Within his heart as he beheld her stand,  
Holding a glittering crown in her right hand :  
"Ogier," she said, "arise and do on thee  
The emblems of thy worldly sovereignty,

For we must pass o'er many a sea this morn."

He rose, and in the glittering tunic worn  
By Charlemaine he clad himself, and took  
The ivory hand, that Charlemaine once shook  
Over the people's heads in days of old ;  
Then on his feet he set the shoes of gold.  
And o'er his shoulders threw the mantle fair,  
And set the gold crown on his golden hair :  
Then on the royal chair he sat him down,  
As though he deemed the elders of the town  
Should come to audience ; and in all he seemed  
To do these things e'en as a man who dreamed.

And now adown the Seine the golden sun  
Shone out, as toward him drew that lovely one  
And took from off his head the royal crown,  
And, smiling, on the pillow laid it down  
And said, " Lie there, O crown of Charlemaine,  
Worn by a mighty man, and worn in vain,  
Because he died, and all the things he did  
Were changed before his face by earth was hid ;  
A better crown I have for my love's head,  
Whereby he yet shall live, when all are dead  
His hand has helped." Then on his head she set  
The wondrous crown, and said, " Forget, forget !  
Forget these weary things, for thou hast much  
Of happiness to think of."

At that touch

He rose, a happy light gleamed in his eyes ;

And smitten by the rush of memories,  
He stammered out, "O love! how came we here?  
What do we in this land of Death and Fear?  
Have I not been from thee a weary while?  
Let us return—I dreamed about the isle;  
I dreamed of other years of strife and pain,  
Of new years full of struggles long and vain."

She took him by the hand and said, "Come, love,  
I am not changed;" and therewith did they move  
Unto the door, and through the sleeping place  
Swiftly they went, and still was Ogier's face  
Turned on her beauty, and no thought was his  
Except the dear returning of his bliss.

But at the threshold of the palace-gate  
That opened to them, she awhile did wait,  
And turned her eyes unto the rippling Seine  
And said, "O love, behold it once again!"  
He turned, and gazed upon the city grey  
Smit by the gold of that sweet morn of May;  
He heard faint noises as of wakening folk  
As on their heads his day of glory broke;  
He heard the changing rush of the swift stream  
Against the bridge-piers. All was grown a dream  
His work was over, his reward was come,  
Why should he loiter longer from his home?

A little while she watched him silently,  
Then beckoned him to follow with a sigh,  
And, raising up the raiment from her feet,

Across the threshold stepped into the street ;  
One moment on the twain the low sun shone,  
And then the place was void, and they were gone  
How I know not ; but this I know indeed,  
That in whatso great trouble or sore need  
The land of France since that fair day has been,  
No more the sword of Ogier has she seen.

SUCH was the tale he told of Avallon.  
E'en such an one as in days past had won  
His youthful heart to think upon the quest ;  
But to those old hearts nigh in reach of rest,  
Not much to be desired now it seemed —  
Perchance the heart that of such things had dreamed  
Had found no words in this death-laden tongue  
We speak on earth, wherewith they might be sung ;  
Perchance the changing years that changed his heart  
E'en in the words of that old tale had part,  
Changing its sweet to bitter, to despair  
The foolish hope that once had glittered there —  
Or think, that in some bay of that far home  
They then had sat, and watched the green waves come  
Up to their feet with many promises ;  
Or the light wind midst blossom-laden trees,  
In the sweet Spring had weighted many a word  
Of no worth now, and many a hope had stirred  
Long dead for ever.

Howsoe'er that be

Among strange folk they now sat quietly,  
As though that tale with them had nought to do,  
As though its hopes and fears were something new.



But though, indeed, the outworn, dwindled band  
Had no tears left for that once longed-for land,  
The very wind must moan for their decay,  
And from the sky, grown dull, and low, and grey,  
Cold tears must fall upon the lonely field,  
That such fair golden hopes erewhile did yield ;  
And on the blackening woods, wherein the doves  
Sat silent now, forgetful of their loves.  
Yet, since a little life at least was left,  
They were not yet of every joy bereft,  
For long ago was past the agony,  
Midst which they found that they indeed must die ;  
And now well-nigh as much their pain was past  
As though death's veil already had been cast  
Over their heads—so, midst some little mirth,  
They watched the dark night hide the gloomy earth.



